FISHKE THE LAME

MENDELE MOCHER SEFORIM

FISHKE THE LAME

FISHKE THE LAME

By

Mendele Mocher Seforim

Freely translated from the Yiddish—
with a Preface by

Dr. Angelo S. Rappoport

STANLEY PAUL & CO. (1928), LTD.,
PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE ANCHOR PRESS, TIPTREE, ESSEX

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A NAP WHILE RECITING THE MORNING PRAYERS	13
II.	FASTING AND STRAWBERRIES	22
III.	ALTER YAKNAHAZ UNBURDENS HIS HEART	29
IV.	A FAIR, AND JEWISH MARRIAGES	33
V.	FISHKE OF THE VAPOUR-BATH	42
VI.	THE MARRIAGE OF FISHKE	46
VII.	TWO JEWS DOING SOME BUSINESS	51
VIII.	THE LOST HORSES AND THE STOLEN CUCUMBER	58
IX.	THE FAIR, OR CHAJA-TRINAH AND HER HUSBAND	67
X.	THE BATTLE WITH THE BED-BUGS	81
XI.	ALTER YAKNAHAZ MEETS FISHKE	87
XII.	A LETTER TO CHAJA-TRINAH	98
XIII.	FISHKE'S STORY; OR, JEWISH "SCHNORRERS"	104
XIV.	THE RED BASTARD	114
XV.	FISHKE RISES IN THE WORLD; OR, THE BLIND ORPHAN AND THE LEADER OF THE GANG OF "SCHNORRERS"	124
XVI.	FISHKE THE LAME AND THE HUNCH-BACK GIRL	132

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII.	FISHKE FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE SOULFUL MAID	141
XVIII.	THE SABBATH GUEST AND THE ANGELS OF PEACE	149
XIX.	FISHKE LOCKED UP IN A CELLAR	160
XX.	FISHKE'S INCREASED SUFFERING	171
XXI.	FISHKE MAKES UP HIS MIND TO DIVORCE HIS WIFE	177
XXII.	FISHKE VISITS ODESSA	184
XXIII.	"SCHNORRING" AT ODESSA; OR, THE ODESSA VAPOUR-BATHS	191
XXIV.	FISHKE MEETS THE HUNCHBACK MAID; OR, IN THE OLD RUIN	198
XXV.	ALTER GOES IN SEARCH OF HIS DAUGHTER; OR, FISHKE'S JOY	213

PREFACE

SALOMON JACOB ABRAMOVITCH, or Mendele Mocher Seforim (Mendele the Bookseller), born in 1835, *died in* 1917, *is known as the grandfather of Yiddish literature. His life, as he wrote himself, had been so arranged by Providence that he had ample opportunity of preparing himself for the role of author describing the life, manners and customs of his poor people living in the Ghetto. "God Almighty said to me: 'Go, my bird, fly about in the world and be the unhappiest of the unhappy, the most Jewish among the Jews'."*

Abramovitch was born in the town of Kopyl, in the government of Minsk in Lithuania. In his early youth he visited a cheder *and later on went to Vilna and Minsk where he studied in the* Yeshibot *or Talmudical academies. At the age of fourteen he lost his father, and his mother married again a man who was the tenant of a water mill on the banks of a river in the midst of a dense forest. Here Abramovitch passed several years, and the surroundings produced a deep and everlasting impression upon his poetic soul, for he was an artist by nature. It was in the mill that Abramovitch's muse appeared to him for the first time and made him conclude an alliance with nature, with the trees, the birds and the insects. To this bond of friendship we are indebted for the most original descriptions of nature to be found in Yiddish literature.*

At the age of eighteen Abramovitch made the acquaintance of one Avremel the Lame, a Jew who had

been leading a vagabond's life in Southern Russia and who described in glowing terms the "newly discovered lands." Avremel persuaded Abramovitch's aunt to go with him in search of her husband who had left her. The aunt, anxious to discover the whereabouts of her faithless spouse, went, taking her nephew with her. Soon, however, the wanderers discovered that Avremel was exploiting them as objects of charity. He collected alms on behalf of the woman and the boy, as a forsaken wife and a poor Talmud student greatly appealed to Jewish pity in all the towns which the trio visited. At Kamenetz-Padolsk, however, where Abramovitch met an old schoolfellow, he was able to extricate himself from his unpleasant situation. The special world of Jewish beggars which, much against his will, the boy had thus had occasion to observe and to study, he afterwards described in his novel Fishke the Lame.

Abramovitch now settled in Kamenetz-Padolsk where he made the acquaintance of the Hebrew poet, A. Gottlober, and under the guidance of the latter's daughter he began to study Russian and German modern literature.

Abramovitch first wrote in Hebrew and then in Judæo-German, under the pseudonym of Mendele Mocher Seforim, or Mendele the Bookseller. His talent particularly manifested itself in his tales and sketches of the life of the common people for whom his sympathy was great. As a noveliest, he penetrated the depths of the masses of his people and of their life and customs.

Among Mendele's works are; Fathers and Sons, The Little Man, The Meat Tax, *or* The Gang of Benefactors, The Kliatshe (The Dobbin), *an allegory describing the Life of the Jews in exile;* The

Travels of Benjamin III, Fishke the Lame, *and the* Wish-ring. *In later years Abramovitch again began to write in classical Hebrew.*

Abramovitch excels in his descriptions of the mass of the Jewish people in the Ghetto, of all those who work and suffer. He is the "poete des gueux" His talent, nay, his genius, is displayed not so much in his conception of Jewish life as in his artistic description of the realistic scenes of ghetto-life. He has the power of analysing not only the souls of his heroes, but his own soul. One might almost say that there are two Mendeles in Abramovitch. His power of analysis soon revealed unto him the anomalies existing in his own soul and in the psychology of his people, the contradictions and discrepancies between aspiration and reality, between refined nerves and weak muscles, between the official title of "chosen race" and the real state of beggars and dealers in old clothes. It is the tragedy of the Jew, and Mendele laughs, but he laughs as they laugh in hell. It is a laughter that grips the very heart strings and hurts. Mendele laughs and tears are rolling down his cheeks, but they are tears of blood. Abramovitch's humour is his own, although distinctly Jewish, for he laughs at himself and at all that is dear to him. It is a humour full of satire and sadness, fraught with tearful laughter.

Mendele Mocher Seforim has been called the Jewish Cervantes, but his humour reminds us of the Russian author Saltykov. He describes, depicts and symbolises the misery of his people, that eternal wanderer and beggar with the torbé *or beggar's bag. "The whole nation of Israel," says one of Abramovitch's heroes, Alter, "is one beggar with a big torbé, or beggar's bag." The*

universal legend of Israel's wealth is a mockery. No doubt there are individual millionaires among the Jews, but the nation itself is one big beggar. One can hear the tearful laughter of Abramovitch when he describes the wealth of his people. In the whole town of Kabzansk (Poortown) there is only one rich man, Judel of Kabzansk, round whose wealth numerous legends are clustering. With a wonderful vividness of detail, with pathetic humour and sympathetic affection, Mendele described the misery of his people.

One of Abramovitch's best stories is Fishke the Lame, *now translated for the first time into English. The story is a very simple one. It is that of a beggar, Fishke the Lame, married to a blind beggar-woman who becomes faithless to him, preferring the company of a stronger man, the leader of a straggling band of mendicants. Fishke falls in love with a black-eyed, hunch-backed maiden, soulful and sad, who is living with the band much against her will.*

Fishke the Lame, *a psychological study of the impulses of beggars and vagabonds, is almost unique in literature. Abramovitch had lived among these beggars and mendicants and the artist in him had discovered the divine spark even among these dregs of society. Mendele the Bookseller's sympathies with humankind are very broad, and he feels that there is a divine element even in the lowest human being. Even the dirtiest ditch reflects an infinitesimal portion of the blue sky.*

ANGELO S. RAPPOPORT.

NOTE.—*Words with superior numbers in the text will be found fully explained in the Notes on p.* 221.

Fishke the Lame

CHAPTER I

A NAP WHILE RECITING THE MORNING PRAYERS

SCARCELY does the bright sun begin to shed its light, dear summer to invade the world, and men to feel as if born anew, their hearts rejoicing at God's beautiful world, when the sad season starts for the really pious Jew. Numerous are the Jewish fast-days and days of mourning throughout the summer until the late autumn, the harbinger of mud and cold winds. For me, however, Mendele the Bookseller, it is a busy season. I am working hard and doing a roaring trade, supplying the children of Israel in the hamlets and in the villages with all they need for their fast-days and days of lamentation: prayer-books and hymn-books, for men and women. In a word, pious Jews are passing their summer in weeping and fasting, praying and mourning, whilst I am doing business. But that is beside the point.

It was a fast-day, the 17th day of the month of Tammuz,[1] the day on which Nebuchadnezzar once sacked Jerusalem. It was early morning, and I was

seated on the box of my wagon-booth, whip in hand, arrayed in my praying shawl and my phylacteries, quite proper and decent, as it behoves a good Jew. My eyes were shut, for I was anxious not to look at the bright world whilst reciting my prayers. Just to spite me, however, nature, as they call it, was wonderfully beautiful just then, and it seemed to me as if some mysterious power was urging me to look at it and to admire it.

For a long time a violent struggle was going on in me. Two powers were wrestling and waging war one with another. The good spirit was saying: "For shame! You must not!" But the evil spirit, the tempter, was nudging me, whispering into my ear: "Never mind! Don't be a silly fool! Enjoy the world."

By force he opened one of my eyes which I was trying to keep shut, and lo! a wonderfully beautiful panorama met my gaze. Fields sprinkled with blooming buckwheat, white like driven snow, intermingled with yellow-golden rows of wheat, and dark-green tall-growing sunflowers. A beautiful green valley, bordered on both sides by forests of nut trees; below, a pure crystal-clear rivulet was winding its course, reflecting the rays of the sun and sparkling like molten gold. From a distance the pasturing sheep and kine looked like so many dark and speckled points. "Fie! Fie!" the good spirit was moralising, quoting words from the *Ethics of the Fathers*. "A Jew must never interrupt his

devotions, and if ever he interrupts his prayers to exclaim: 'How beautiful is this tree, or how beautiful is this field!' he is guilty of a grievous sin, just as if he were committing suicide." The tempter, however, did his best, trying to lead me astray. Under my very nose he wafted the wonderful smell of fresh-mown hay, the perfume of flowers that caressed my nostrils. The sweet song of the birds struck my ear and tickled my very soul. A warm breeze was caressing my face, playing in my hair, and murmuring in my ear: "Look! Enjoy the world and beautiful nature, you silly Jew!" I struggled hard; babbling my prayers and inventing insults against nature and her creatures. All the time my brain was trying to think: "What are they? Dead matter! Dead leaves! Carcasses without either life or soul." I began to concentrate my thoughts upon my morning prayers, swaying my body to and fro, in an endeavour to chase away evil thoughts, and I finished the prayer which ends with the words: "He who returns their souls to the dead carcasses." Ha! What! Whom do I mean by it? I was ashamed of my innermost thoughts, the thoughts that were crowding my brain! As if to excuse myself before the Creator, the Master of the Universe, I pretended that my insult was not meant for His creatures but for my own horse. Striking it with the whip in my hand, I shouted: "Get a move on, you carcass."

A good idea? What? But to-day it had but

little effect. Inwardly I felt annoyed that just to-day such thoughts should crowd my brain involuntarily and against my own will. I remembered that it was a fast-day, the anniversary of a great calamity that had once, in bygone days, befallen Israel. On the 17th of Tammuz, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had entered Jerusalem and sacked it. With a woebegone face I recited the *Selihot*[1] for the day in a voice rising higher and higher and choked with sobs.

A Jew, when he has recited his prayers and *Selihot* to his heart's content, feels as if he had done all that is required of him; he feels quite content, like a child after it has been whacked. I sit on the box, light-hearted, stroking my beard, as if saying: "Father in Heaven! I have done my duty, now it is Thy turn to do something and to show Thy clemency and justice."—"Get along," I say, addressing the mare, mentally begging its pardon for the epithet of "carcass" I had bestowed upon it a while ago. My *Shlimmezalnik*[2] bends down upon its fore-legs, touches the ground with its head and groans, as if it were saying:

"My respected and honoured master! What about some food?"

"Clever," think I, "clever, indeed, as the day," and I signal to the animal to rise up and to stand on its legs.

Is it not written in the *Lamentations*: "Zion, in thee all cattle and birds are wise"? Which means

that among the children of Israel even the kine are clever; though I mean something quite different.

Plunging into deep meditations, I began to reflect upon the house of Israel, its conduct, its intelligence, its wisdom, its clever men, and incidentally also its position; thoughts crowded my brain, my head was in a whirl. Methought that I saw that viper Nebuchadnezzar with his hosts; was witnessing a terrible battle; his hosts sacking and burning, tearing down walls and breaking windows. I saw Jews carrying packs, old clothes, and utensils upon their shoulders, valiant and animated with great courage—shouting for help and—running away. I, too, seized a stick and tried to run, and suddenly I was lying stretched out at full length upon the ground.

What had happened? During my prayers, Heaven forgive me, I must have fallen asleep. I cast a look upon my wagon-booth; it is standing in a mud puddle which, in the language of drivers, is called an inkpot. The back wheels are entangled with the axle of another cart, and my poor mare, one leg outside the shaft, is standing in distress, entwined in the reins, breathing hard, panting like a goose. From the other side of the strange cart I hear curses in Yiddish, accompanied by a gasping and coughing. A Jew, think I; no danger therefore; and, getting very angry, I run over to the other side. Here I find him lying under the cart, entangled in his praying shawl and phylacteries, his whip entwined with the straps of the phylacteries,

working hard to extricate himself. I shout: "How ever!" He shouts: "What do you mean?" I send him and his father to the devil; he sends *me* and *my* father to the devil, including also my mother. I howl: "How dare a Jew to fall asleep during prayers!" He retorts: "How dare a Jew snore during prayers." I whip his mare; he, extricating himself, whips *mine*. The two mares rise upon their fore-legs, whilst we, their masters, run one against the other, ready for fight, like two cocks, and are on the point of seizing one another by our earlocks. For a moment, however, we stand still, each waiting for the other to begin.

It must have looked very strange, truly, a sight for the gods, to see two Jewish heroes arrayed in praying shawls and phylacteries, both boiling with rage, eager to manifest their strength and heroism, and each ready to box the other's ears in the open field, as if it had been a place of worship or a synagogue. We stand still, for the first time raising our eyes and each examining his opponent, when suddenly we jump aside simultaneously, exclaiming:

"Oy, Reb[1] Alter!"—"Oy, oy, Reb Mendele!"

Alter Yaknahaz is a stumpy, short, corpulent fellow. His face is thickly overgrown with dirty yellow hair, of which there is plenty for earlocks, a beard, and moustaches, both for himself and also for other Jews. From this ocean of hair emerges, like a bright island, a flat, fleshy nose which is generally suffering from a chronic cold. A change

in the nose occurs, however, about Easter, when the weather is thawing and the ice on the rivers is breaking. Then the owner of the nose is taking it into his hands, beginning to work upon it with his five fingers. He gives a concert then, blowing upon his nose in a masterly fashion. The nose emits sounds like those issuing from the ram-horn, and the whole town of Parasiteville is resounding, so that people stand agape in the streets and listen. On these occasions snuff is offered freely to the nose, and congratulations pour upon its owner. Such is the nose of Alter Yaknahaz. There must be some secret cause why the majority of noses in small Jewish towns begin to make themselves heard at that season, but it is beside the point.

Old Yaknahaz is a bookseller from Parasiteville, an old acquaintance of mine. He is a selfish man, not over-intelligent, not very talkative, always sulky as if cross with the whole world, though not at all a bad fellow at heart. After a warm greeting on both sides, we begin, as is the habit among Jews, to make inquiries in a roundabout way.

"And whither is a Jew travelling?" I ask Alter.

"Whither a Jew is travelling, Atj?"[1] retorts Alter, answering my query with another question, as is the habit among Jews.

"A Jew is going to the devil."

"And whither is Reb Mendele going?" he asks in his turn.

"There," says I, "where I am usually going at this time of the year."

"I understand," says Alter, "you are going to Foolstown, where I am also going." His tone indicated that he was somewhat annoyed, as if I might do him harm in business.

"And whence is a Jew coming?" I ask again.

"Whence a Jew is coming?" retorts Alter. "From your fine fair, the fair of Yarmelinetz, a plague on it."

Whilst my Alter was pestering and cursing Yarmelinetz and its fair, there suddenly came upon us a company of yokels in their carts, and, shouting and cursing, wanted to know why the road was barred. Coming a little nearer and beholding two Jews arrayed in praying shawls and phylacteries, they assumed a more insulting tone and roughly and mockingly exclaimed: "Look at the fine fellows! Eh! Sheenies, Gaberdines, hurry up, make way for your betters!"

Hurriedly, Alter and I began to busy ourselves with our carts. A couple of the yokels, though not of the children of Israel—but the truth must be told—had sufficient sense of decency to help us in our distress. In consequence of the merit of their pushing and shoving, our carts were soon dragged out of the inkpot; otherwise, Heaven alone knows how long it might have taken us, or how fearfully we might have torn our praying shawls. With the help of the sons of Esau it was quite a

different matter. They pushed and shoved in a proper manner, as it is said, "And the hands are the hands of Esau," whilst with us Jews, *lehavdil*[1] it was "the voice of Jacob." They were really pushing, whilst we were shouting and pretending to shove. However, that is beside the point.

As soon as the road was free, the uncouth yokels went their way, and turning their phizzes towards us scoffed and laughed at us, two Jews arrayed like priests, and serving their Creator even whip in hand. Some of them, taking hold of their coat-tails, held them up like a sow's ear and shouted "*Yid, Helamid.*"[2]

Alter did not care much about their conduct and their insults. "Rubbish," he said, shrugging his shoulders; "yokels! Who cares about them and why should one be ashamed?" But I was greatly affected, and their mockery cut me to the heart. "Why, Master of the Universe?" I cried. "Why? Why?" and I poured out an ardent prayer to the Ruler of the Universe, beseeching Him to have pity upon His people and to remember His faithful servants, including me, Mendele, the son of Gnendel. I poured out my heart, in the words of our books of prayers and supplications.

CHAPTER II

FASTING AND STRAWBERRIES

WITHOUT more ado we climbed into our carts, and started away again. I was driving in front, Alter following me. His cart, with a hood made of old torn mats, ran on four rickety wheels, not of the same size, and kept together with bits of cord. They were screeching and groaning as the cart moved. An old, tall, lean mare deigned to drag along this primitive vehicle.

I had finished my prayers, but now once more a struggle began with the tempter. He was nudging me, whispering into my ear: "Have a drink, refresh yourself." "No, no, it is the seventeenth of Tammuz, a fast-day; how dare I?"

"*Atj*," he retorted, "what has Nebuchadnezzar to do with you? Greater misfortunes have since befallen Israel, and yet Jews are still alive! Don't be a fool. You are weak and feeble; never mind the fast." I passed my hand over my face as if to drive away a persistent fly, and, meanwhile, I stole a peep under the hood of my cart where I usually keep a satchel containing a drop of brandy, buckwheat and honey cakes, garlic, onions, and other delicacies. My mouth was watering, my heart was faint, my

stomach was grumbling and groaning. "For pity's sake," it was crying, "a drop of brandy."

I turn away my head and cast a look about me so as to drive away the evil thoughts. Upon the blue sky there is no trace of a cloud, the sun is hot and scorching, and not the slightest breeze is to be felt. The corn upon the fields and the trees in the forests are standing still and motionless as if chained. The kine on the pasturing grounds are lying about tired out, with outstretched necks, shaking their ears from time to time, chewing the cud. Some of them paw the ground under their feet, or strike it with their horns, and are bellowing on account of the heat. A bull is racing to and fro with tail uplifted, throwing his head hither and thither, but suddenly stands still, bending down his head to the ground, smelling it, snorting heavily through his nostrils, growling, panting, and kicking up his hoofs. By the side of an old shrivelled-up, half-blasted willow, split in twain by lightning, stand horses with their heads one upon the other so as to get some sort of shade, wagging their tails to brush off the flies. High up on a twig stands a magpie, looking from afar as if arrayed in a praying shawl with a blue border; it is swaying its body to and fro, jumping up and bending low, making genuflexions as if engaged in prayer. A little lower down stands a small crow; it chirps once or twice, then suddenly remains still, looking out into the world and dozing off with sleepy eyes.

All around me there reigns an impressive stillness

and silence. Not a flap of a bird's wing is heard, not a leaf is stirring, only gnats and wasps are filling the air, flying about like so many nimble imps, flitting round my ears, grating as if buzzing a secret, and off again; yonder, in the hay, and in the corn, the crickets are humming and playing on the cymbal.

It is hot, it is still, it is calm, and it is wonderfully beautiful! God's creatures are having a rest! I was under my hood almost naked, that is to say, in my shirt, my felt cap on the back of my head and my woollen socks which, for my sins, I am wearing even in summer, rolled down. Although I was perspiring terribly, I would have been quite happy, had not the sun been so scorching, because I like to perspire. It is a trait inherited from my father—peace be upon him!—who was famous for it. He, my father, was very popular among his neighbours, and in the vapour baths people used to look up to him with great respect when he got up to the highest step. [1] Altogether, to perspire is a great Jewish virtue. No good Jew celebrates his Sabbath or his festival without thoroughly perspiring beforehand. No nation in the world sweats and perspires so much as do our people. And whilst I was thus perspiring, you can imagine how tremendous was my yearning for some refreshment. My throat was dry and parched; I was dying for a drink, I was faint with hunger! And once more the tempter was at my side! He was whispering into my ear,

enumerating all the appetising dishes from a thoroughly Jewish menu.

My appetite was tremendous, whilst the tempter was continuing to read the menu. And suddenly, I do not exactly remember how it really happened, but my satchel was in my hand.

"Your health, little fool," the tempter was speaking out of my own mouth; "enough to make an ass of yourself." Mechanically, as if by itself, my hand was stretched out, I opened the satchel, hastily grasped the bottle, looking about me like a thief afraid of being caught in the act. Suddenly my eye met that of my horse. The animal had turned its head towards the hood, looking somewhat annoyed as if offended, and thus seemed to address me: "Look at me, master! My hind leg is swollen, done up in rags; one eye is running, my throat is parched. May I be stricken dumb if I remember the taste of oats, and yet here am I dragging along the wagon-booth, not venturing to strike or to refuse to do my duty and throw off my yoke!" The bottle fell from my hand back into the satchel, which I pushed away, greatly ashamed. With a groan and a sigh from the bottom of my heart, I said aloud: "It is the horse from whom man ought to take an example and learn virtue and morals." Is it not written: "And He makes us learn a lesson from the cattle in the world"?

"No, my little horse," I continued, "I, too, will do my duty and not unharness. Never mind the

devil will not take us." Is it not written: "God helps both man and beast alike"?

A Jew, once he has conquered the ugly passion for food, cares but little for it, and is quite capable of keeping alive on little. There are even now plenty of Jews who have practically no stomach at all, only just a vestige, a sign of it, and there is great hope that Jews will gradually give up eating altogether, and among the generations to come will have no stomach at all. They will then be greatly respected in the world.

What I am trying to convey is that after I had pushed aside my satchel I felt a better man, quite well and strong. I now began to think of business, contentedly humming a tune from the *Lamentations*, when suddenly there stood before me a peasant woman, provokingly good looking, offering to sell me a pot full of strawberries! Of all the fruit in the world—strawberries! which I happen to be so very fond of! Others in my place would have imagined that it was no real woman at all, but the devil himself in disguise, the devil who had assumed the comely shape of the woman, to tempt me once more. I, however, was not such a fool; I looked quite closely at her, and—no, she was a real woman without any subterfuge. She was begging me to buy the pot and the strawberries for the trifle of ten *groshen*. As she was holding up the pot to my very nose, the perfume penetrated into my nostrils. My heart was beating fast, my mouth was watering,

I felt a sudden faintness and dizziness coming over me. My passion for the strawberries was tremendous.

I was afraid of myself, I was afraid that I would not be able to resist temptation any longer. What was to be done ? I flew into a passion, jumped down from my cart ; I wonder I did not break my neck, for I was trying to save myself like a man running away from a fire. I shouted in a muffled voice : " Reb Alter." My innermost thought was to have Alter near me and make him act as guardian of my piety.

Alter was lying under the hood of his cart, face downwards, his shirt open, showing his chest covered with red hair, his countenance as red as a beetroot, sweat streaming down it. It was a sight to rend anybody's heart.

" Ha ! What ? " he asks, in a muffled voice sounding like that of a cow. " What is the matter ? "

I look round, but the woman with the pot had evidently taken fright and suddenly disappeared. I must make some excuse for waking Alter.

" What time do you suppose it to be now ? "

" What time I suppose it to be now ? " answers Alter, his voice sounding muffled, " what time ? How should I know ? A good long while yet before the first stars will appear in the sky ; well, it can't be helped. Oh, it is very hot."

" A pleasant heat, ah ? " I say, walking along by the side of Alter's cart. " You are perspiring, Reb Alter ! I think it is time now to pasture our eagles, I mean our horses, who are dragging along

with difficulty. There are a good many miles yet before we reach Foolstown. Not far from here, yonder where the wood is running towards the high road, I see a good place for pasturing."

A few minutes later we had reached the spot where there was a fine wood, beautiful meadows and all good things. We unharnessed our lions and let them pasture freely at the outskirts of the wood, whilst we stretched ourselves under a tree.

CHAPTER III

ALTER YAKNAHAZ UNBURDENS HIS HEART

Old Yaknahaz was scarcely able to breathe on account of the oppressive heat. He was sighing and groaning so that my heart actually ached for him, and in order to console him a little, and also with a view to beguiling the time, I tried to drag the taciturn and sulky man into a conversation.

"You seem to be feeling the heat, Reb Alter?"

"Bah!" curtly answered my companion, as if he were angry, whilst trying to make himself comfortable under the tree where there was but little protection from the scorching sun.

"Aren't you feeling well on account of the fast?" I queried again, firmly decided to make the fellow speak.

"Bah!" Alter answered again, altering his position under the tree.

But I was not satisfied with his *Bahs*. "You are an obstinate fellow," I thought, "but never mind; I will make you talk." The best way to make a Jew speak is to talk business; he cannot resist it, and were he even on the point of death, he would revive at once on hearing some business discussed. "I think, Reb Alter, that we shall do a bit of business

together, and it is rather lucky that we should have met to-day. I have goods with me, something exceptional, pure gold." My stratagem was working, for Alter suddenly seemed to have become another man. Lifting up his head, he looked at me with eyes full of interest.

"This time," I continued craftily, "our business will be a cash transaction. You are returning from the fair of Yarmelinetz and must have your pockets well lined."

"My pockets well lined!" retorted Alter in a tone of annoyance; "a heart full of pain I have, that's what I have. I tell you, Reb Mendele—well, nothing; a man without luck had better never have been born. I wanted to do big business. Another man in my place—eh-eh-eh! whilst I—it is always with the butter downwards. Such a misfortune! It is painful to relate and a shame to confess it. Well, never mind."

I saw at once that something was wrong with my Alter and that some misfortune had befallen him. Since he has opened his mouth, I thought, I have only to turn a screw and the words will flow. I did my best, turned on the right screw, and Alter began to relate as follows:

"Well, then, I come to the fair of Yarmelinetz; arriving there, I unpack my goods and wait for business. I went to Yarmelinetz for my sins, for you must understand that at present I am not in clover. The printer is pressing for money; well, that is

nothing, let him press, but the point is that he refuses to deliver any more goods. Then again my eldest girl is advancing in years, and a grown-up girl must marry. Well, then, I have to cudgel my brain how to find her a husband. Husbands and fiancés there are plenty, but *one* fiancé is another matter. To crown all, my wife suddenly had the fancy to give birth to a boy ; you can see what that means, when your wife gives birth to a boy just before Passover and you have to celebrate the ceremony of circumcision. Well, never mind."

" Excuse me," I interrupted Alter's flow of words, " why did you marry again a young wife who is giving you so many children ? "

" God be with you ! " Alter exclaimed, quite astonished. " Why I took a wife ? How could I do without a mistress in the house ? Why does a Jew take unto himself a wife ? Because he requires a mistress to look after his house."

" Quite right, Reb Alter," I replied, " but why then did you divorce your first wife ? Was she not a good mistress and housekeeper ? "

" Bah ! " was all that Alter said, but his countenance grew rather gloomy.

" I do not believe that she was barren either," I added ; " and what has become of your poor children ? "

" Bah ! " repeated Alter, scratching his head under his earlock, waving his hand and sighing from the bottom of his heart.

Bah is a very valuable and useful word among Jews; it serves as an answer to many questions, and helps the Jew out in many an hour of need. It has many meanings, and you can interpret it in many ways. A Jew usually grasps the right meaning of the famous *Bah*. Alter's last *Bah* contained something like regret, remorse, yearning, and self-accusation. There was evidently a heavy load upon his heart when he remembered his ugly conduct as far as his first wife and his children were concerned. In every misfortune that befell him he must have seen a Divine punishment for his sins. His sighing meant as much as "I know that I am guilty." I bitterly regretted having so clumsily opened Alter's wounds. It is one of the habits of Jews to poke their noses where they are not wanted; to ask questions and to open old or fresh wounds when a man is anxious to be left alone with his grief and his sorrow. I was also sorry to notice that all my endeavours to make Alter speak had been wasted. I did not lose hope, however; once more I resorted to my strategy, and once more the pendulum of loquacity was set into motion. Alter began to talk and to unburden his heart.

CHAPTER IV

A FAIR, AND JEWISH MARRIAGES

"Well, then, so I am at the fair, standing by the side of my cart and looking about. I see a vast crowd of Jews, all in a great hurry, doing business, and all very much alive. Jews at a fair are like fish in water, that is to say, in their own element. In their case the blessing of our Patriarch Jacob is being realised: 'They shall multiply like fishes in the world.' Is it true, Reb Mendele, that it is written like this in our Holy Book? Is it also written, as Jews are in the habit of saying, 'A fair in Heaven'? It evidently means that a Jew's idea of the next world is a fair. Well, never mind. I see Jews running hither and thither, doing business, buying and selling. Among them I perceive Berl Teletze[1]; in olden times he was a teacher's assistant, then an employé, and now he is a well-to-do merchant owning a big shop. I see Jews running about singly and in pairs, gesticulating, pointing with the index, chewing the point of their beards, every one in a hurry, greatly excited, too busy to say a word. I look at them, and envy creeps into my heart. They are all running after fortune and evidently on the point of making money, whilst I am standing here like

an automaton, a clumsy fool, by the side of my cart, exhibiting my wares. What wares? Rubbish; old prayer- and hymn-books; hymns composed by the pious Sarah—all her hymns are worth threepence. You can imagine the profit they will yield. And from these earnings I am supposed to marry my daughter! In my innermost heart I am cursing my cart, cursing my lean mare, wishing that they had never existed. Enough, I say, enough! I, too, must try my luck, do some big business like others. But what? I push back my cap upon my head, my brain and my hands begin to work. A straw from a neighbouring wagon finds its way into my mouth; I chew it, whilst brain and hands are busy. 'Got it,' I exclaim; 'a splendid idea: a marriage between two merchants, well-to-do people owning shops at the fair.' You understand, Reb Mendele, I had made up my mind to turn matchmaker and to bring about a marriage between two well-to-do merchants, one of them being Reb Eljakim Sharogroder, and the other Reb Getzel Greidinger. No sooner has the idea entered my head than I send my cart and my mare, together with the printer, to hell, and assiduously devote myself to my new business. There is hope and there are prospects. I am running from Reb Getzel to Reb Eljakim and from Reb Eljakim to Reb Getzel. I am running hither and thither, thank God, like other business men, very busy, not worse than other Jews; I am working hard, for the business *must* succeed, and at

once, that is to say here, at the fair. There is no better opportunity for a marriage than a fair. Well then, quickly, in a hurry, the business is arranged. The fathers of the young people have seen each other and both are very willing; well, what more do you want, since both parties are ready and willing? I am swelling with pride and joy, counting my profits which I look upon as if I had them already in my pocket. I am already calculating how much dowry I would be able to give my girl. On the strength of my profits I buy drilling for bedding and am on the point of bargaining for a velvet overcoat with a second-hand clothes dealer. As for shirts, that is, of course, of minor importance, the last worry; it will be as luck will have it. Well, never mind; but listen what happened. I tell you, Reb Mendele, if you have no luck it is better you had never been born. I had no luck, for when we were already on the point of settling the business and breaking plates,[1] and were incidentally thinking of bride and bridegroom—well guess what happened! It is a shame and a heartache to relate, but it turned out nothing; no, worse than nothing, it turned out topsy-turvy. Listen to my misfortune, to God's punishment; it turned out that both fathers had—what do you think they had?—that both had boys!"

"But, Reb Alter," I exclaimed, breaking out into a loud laugh, "forgive me, I beg you, but how could you have been so silly as to try and bring about

a match before making sure who of the parents had a boy and who had a girl ? "

"Of course," said Alter, rather offended, "of course you may laugh ; but believe me, I am not as silly as you imagine. Thank God, I am endowed with intelligence just as many another man. Are you a Jew and not aware how matches are usually arranged among Jews ? You, Reb Mendele, know perfectly well how matches are settled among us Jews. Thus I knew that Reb Eljakim *ought* to have a girl—and what a girl ! A beauty ! Did I not see her with mine own eyes a year ago ? Well, what of it ? If you have no luck then your wisdom and your intelligence are of no avail. Just to spite me it turns out that the silly girl had been in a hurry and had taken it into her head to get married without waiting for my assistance. Why on earth had she been in such a tremendous hurry ? And how was I to know it ? I was quite ignorant of the fact ; may I be as ignorant of my poverty. Now I am asking you, Reb Mendele, judge yourself, did I not act properly and like a man of business ? I came to Reb Eljakim and thus I spoke to him : 'Reb Eljakim,' say I, 'I should like to bring about an alliance between yourself and Reb Getzel.' Thus I said, quite properly and like a Jew. Whom could I have had in my mind if not Reb Eljakim's girl, and with whom could I wish to marry her if not with Reb Getzel's boy ? To say all this explicitly was superfluous and not businesslike,

because it is understood that a marriage is brought about between a girl and a boy and not between two boys. Well, I think that I acted as like a business man as possible, and no one in my place would have acted otherwise. Without wasting words on matters which had to be taken for granted, I immediately came to the essentials, to brass tacks. I spoke about the dowry, the trousseau, board for the married couple, etc. You must also remember that at a fair you cannot waste idle words when talking to merchants, for their time is money; you must count your words and only talk business. That is as far as I am concerned. As for Reb Eljakim, he was also right. When I told him that I was anxious to bring about an alliance between himself and Reb Getzel, he naturally thought of his boy. What else could he think of? It never entered his mind that I meant his girl, knowing full well that his girl was already married and that he had a boy to lead under the canopy. Well, so you see that we were both right. Now you understand?"

"Bah!" said I, scarcely able to repress my laughter and making superhuman efforts to keep a serious face.

"Thank God," said Alter, "that you do understand," pointing at me with the index of his right hand. "There you are," he added, as if I had hit the nail upon the head.

To tell the truth, Alter's arguments did not seem quite so silly to me. "Why not?" I thought; marriages among us Jews are indeed being

arranged only between the families. It is an alliance between wealth, rank, and position; why should not such mistakes happen? Looking quite kindly at Alter, I said once more, almost involuntarily, "Bah!"

"There you are," said Alter, pointing at me with his finger; "I am right, am I not, when I say that you understand now? But we have not yet finished. A faint hope still lingered within me. When I take up a business I do not so easily give it up."

"But, Reb Alter," I exclaimed, "God be with you! What are you talking about?" I was amazed at his words, imagining that the heat had affected him and turned his brain. "What hope could you have entertained when you knew that both parents had boys?"

"Hush, hush," said Alter, "don't get excited; and let me explain. It is all right, Reb Mendele, I am not mad. The pulse of hope was still beating, for, you see, God Almighty creates the remedy before the disease. There was still Mr. Teletze, who had not yet entered the scene. At the very beginning already I had been thinking of Teletze. He has plenty of girls, lots of them. Eljakim, Getzel, Teletze were crowding my brain, but as my ill-luck would have it, I had just chosen Reb Eljakim and put Teletze aside. When the misfortune befell me, I at once hastened to repair my mistake and led Teletze into the arena, Teletze, a well-to-do, highly respected man. In short,

I minimised the mistake, *my* mistake, *their* mistake; never mind. *I* was a little to be blamed, but above all it was a question of luck and destiny. It had not been decreed in Heaven, you understand? And now I began over again, expatiating upon the merits of Reb Berl Teletze. He is—may the evil eye not touch him!—a very wealthy man and a charitable man; president of many charitable societies. Reb Berl Teletze—who has not heard of Reb Berl Teletze? Needless for me to add that he is also a clever and an intelligent man, for that is already implied in the very word *wealthy*. In short, my spark of hope soon developed into a flame.

" 'All is for the best,' I said; ' it is lucky that two boys have emerged like oil upon the water. Now I require two girls for them, and Teletze, the father of several girls, will help me out. With the help of the Almighty it will be quite all right.' To cut a long story short, I began again to work hard; I was running hither and thither, was very busy. At first it seemed as if things were going on well, when suddenly, and just to annoy me, the fair came to an end. The fair was over, all the merchants quickly packed up and left, and all my labour had been wasted and lost. Now you understand," Alter continued, turning again to me, speaking as in prayer, stretching out both hands as if he were pouring out his bitter heart and supplicating me to help him. " Now you understand,

I tell you, when you have no luck all your cleverness is of no avail. Ah, woe unto me, the anger of God has come down upon me, it is a punishment for my sins !—What were you saying ? You were talking of business for cash. Have I a spare copper in my pocket ? Woe and woe is unto me."

"Oy," I suddenly exclaimed. "Oy, just as in the vapour-bath," and I gave myself a good bang under the tree.

Alter stared at me, shook his head, was very angry, muttering to himself :

"What a rogue of a Jew. A man is talking to him almost to the point of bursting ; thinking only of himself ; pish—himself ! no fun ! hot as in the vapour-bath, he says ; he might melt away ! Never mind, I know these Jewish tricks ; this is only a pretext of which a Jew is availing himself to take back his word ; knowing that the other has no cash, he will no longer do any business with him."

"Really," I said, taking Alter by the beard, as is the custom among Jews, and thus addressing him : "What is the matter with you, Reb Alter ? How can you harbour such thoughts ? I have something quite different in my mind. Your story, Reb Alter, reminds me of another story which happened once in the vapour-bath in Foolstown ; almost the same story, only shorter ; it ended with a crack—that is, a wedding. You are perspiring, Reb Alter ? If you do not mind, just move a

little so that I can lie with my back to the sun and tell you the story."

Alter wiped the perspiration off his face with his shirt sleeve, took out a pipe with some unknown beauty painted upon it, cleaned the short shank, lighted his pipe, got a little peep at the picture of the beauty, and stretched himself at full length under the tree. I coughed and began my story.

CHAPTER V

FISHKE OF THE VAPOUR-BATH

"In the brick-walled vapour-bath at Foolstown a young man named Fishke has been living for some time. Who is this Fishke? Whence did he come? Neither I nor anyone else ever tried to find out. Who cares? A human being is going about, a Fishke, like so many others of his kidney. They suddenly appear in our midst, grow up like mushrooms, and no one knows their origin. Somewhere in holes and in corners there dwell poor people who bring into the world children, people the world in silence; who cares? Whose business is it? They fructify and multiply in silence, and, thank God, the crop is abundant. Suddenly the little brats grow up and go out into the world, and there you have crowds of Fishkes, Haims, and Yosseles, naked, barefoot, and hungry. You would not have called Fishke a personality. He has a flat nose, a wide mouth with yellow crooked teeth, lisps when talking, cannot pronounce the letter 'r,' and is lame. Fishke was already advanced in years, and as far as he himself was concerned he would have been quite willing and ready to get married long ago, and bestow upon Foolstown a few children.

But with Fishke's usual ill-luck, the community had entirely forgotten him and allowed him to remain a bachelor without a wife. It is, of course, heart-rending, and Fishke deserves our pity, but such was his destiny, a bachelor and wifeless he remained. Fishke, as a rule, went about barefooted and coatless, his garments consisting of a long patched shirt and a pair of inexpressibles of coarse linen. His work consisted in walking down the street and calling out on Fridays: 'Gentlemen, to the vapour-bath,' and on Wednesdays: 'Ladies, to the vapour-bath.' When summer came and green vegetables appeared, you could hear a voice like that of a fish calling out: 'Buy, Jews, buy young garlic!' In the vapour-bath Fishke had many occupations; he used to keep watch over the clothes of the bathers, hand over a bucket of water, bring a live coal, handing it from one hand to the other in a masterful way to light a pipe. Such and many other services he would render, for which he was often substantially rewarded, receiving a half-penny or even a penny. In consideration of his occupations Fishke was already looked upon as a communal employé, and thus enjoyed many privileges bestowed upon paid communal servants.

"Thus he had a right to go in company of all the workers in the vapour-bath from house to house, to beg for gifts of money on the Feast of Dedication and the Feast of Esther, to be present at the ceremony of circumcision and be treated to a glass of brandy

and a piece of honey cake; to go from house to house with a bag during Passover and collect pieces of unleavened bread. Such and other similar rights and privileges, which are the appanage of communal servants, did Fishke enjoy. I knew him very well indeed and always liked to talk to him, as I enjoyed his conversation. He was not such a fool as he looked. Whenever I happen to come to Foolstown, my first business is to run down to the brick-walled vapour-bath there to warm my bones and to clean my socks and other things in the steam. I tell you there is no greater pleasure than that of perspiring. I would even now enjoy the perspiration, were it not for the sun that is shining directly into my face.

"Would you mind moving a little farther, Reb Alter? You are properly perspiring, but move just a little; that is right."

"Well, make an end of it," said Alter in an angry voice. "I think I have moved away far enough; don't drag it out, I beg you, and cut it short."

"Have patience, Reb Alter, the day is still young," I said and continued my story:

"When I was at Foolstown a few years ago and met Fishke in the street, I nearly jumped out of my skin, so great was my surprise. My Fishke, with his crooked legs, looked quite a toff, dressed up in new togs from head to foot. He had on a new coat, new shoes and socks, wearing upon his head a new plush cap. What could this mean? I

wondered. Could it mean that after all the community had remembered Fishke and got him married ? Whilst I was thus wondering, Fishke suddenly disappeared from view and I remained in ignorance. As I did not feel quite well in those days, I decided to visit the vapour-bath on the next morning, not only in the hope of getting rid of the ailments that were afflicting me, but also for the purpose of gathering there all the important news. The vapour-bath in a small Jewish town is the best place for news gathering, for there you hear all that is going on in the world ; you hear both local and world news. In the vapour-bath I hoped I should also learn about Fishke and the fortune that had evidently fallen to his lot.

CHAPTER VI

THE MARRIAGE OF FISHKE

"The next morning I was early at the vapour-bath, before the customers had begun to flock in. In the ante-room I met Berl the bath-rubber, busy binding besoms. Not far away stood Itzig the guardian, a Jew with a long beard, who had been in the business for over thirty years. His work consisted in standing there with folded arms, watching over the bundles of garments laid aside by the bathers, and wishing good health [1] to the owners as they emerged from the hot-room. He was standing there yawning loudly and stretching his arms, conversing with Berl, calculating his revenue and expenditure, and, *en passant*, criticising the customers and their niggardliness.

"Berl and Itzig received me with open arms, welcoming me and greeting me with the traditional 'Blessed be he that entereth,'[2] for they had not seen me for some time. We began to talk about many things until we came to Fishke.

"'And where is our Fishke now?' I asked.

"'Fishke,' said Berl, shaking a little besom, 'Fishke is now a made man.'

"'Fishke,' said Itzig, 'is a toff and never expected to be so happy and well-off.'

"And Berl, taking up the thread of our conversation, told me as follows:

"It was a Thursday afternoon; we had worked very hard, and had just stretched ourselves a little on the benches to get a little rest from our labours; we were smoking and chatting quite happily, when suddenly a carriage stopped before the bath. Well, what of it? Suddenly three men entered the baths, loudly wishing us good evening.

"'Where is Fishke?' they asked at once. At first we were a little frightened, for what business could they have with Fishke and why were they so eager to learn of his whereabouts? But after all, we thought, what harm could they do to poor Fishke? He is not a thief or a swindler; he is neither a shopkeeper, nor a merchant, nor a banker, and as for being enlisted as a soldier, there is no fear either, as Fishke is lame and not fit for military service.

"Taking heart, we inquired in our turn: 'You want Fishke, do you? And what may be your business with him, with Fishke, we mean?'

"The three men hesitated awhile, but at last decided to tell us the truth.

"'You know the woman,' they said, 'who is known as the blind orphan, whose business it is to sit daily at the entrance of the synagogue that is in front of the old cemetery. There she sits daily begging alms. That is her business and her

source of revenue. The blind orphan having remained a widow had made up her mind to marry again. She had been affianced to a carrier to whom she had promised a small dowry and a suit of new clothes and had also undertaken to keep him after the marriage, for she is earning a good living, her begging business yielding quite a decent income. Well, everything was ready for the wedding, and the wedding supper had been prepared. The bride, arrayed in festive garments, shining as a good daughter of Zion should before being led under the canopy, was waiting for the bridegroom to appear. But lo! at the last moment the fine young man made himself scarce, evaporated. We waited an hour, and two, but there was no bridegroom! It turned out that his grandmother, who had been for many years cook in the house of the wealthiest man in the town and the most respected member of the community, had suddenly taken it into her head to object to the match. It was beneath her and her grandson. Imagine it, a cook at the house of the most respected member of the community before whom all the communal servants, even the beadle and the second reader, bowed, and who even extended their respects to his highly appreciated cook on account of her famous and tasty dishes! It is no small position, that of cook in the house of the foremost man in the community! "No," she cried, "this match will never take place."

"'Well, the grandson changed his mind and refused

to lead the bride under the canopy. We were all nonplussed, and what could be done? We were sorry, not so much for the bride and bridegroom as for the supper, fish and meat and other delicacies. Was all our labour to have been in vain? It would be a veritable sin. But suddenly we had an idea; we remembered Fishke the Lame. "Fishke," we exclaimed. "Why should not Fishke save us in an hour of need? Let Fishke the Lame lead the blind orphan under the canopy! Why should he not? It would not be a bad match for him!" And thus we have come to fetch Fishke and marry him.'

"Whilst the three men were thus speaking, Fishke suddenly came in. We at once took hold of him, briefly acquainting him with the happiness in store for him. 'Come along,' said the emissaries, 'come along, young man; it is enough to walk about idly; come along and get married, as it behoves a good Jew.'

"And thus Fishke the Lame married the blind orphan.

"And now," continued Berl, "Fishke walks about dressed like a toff. His business consists in taking his wife down every morning to her business premises, that is to say, to her stand at the gate of the old cemetery, and to come in the evening to fetch her home. He need no longer have any worry as to his sustenance, for his wife is earning a good living, and her begging business is quite

flourishing. The couple live quite happily together."

"All this, Reb Alter, Berl told me, and now you see how matches and marriages are arranged among Jews, not only among the poor but also among the rich. Family weds family, ranks marries rank, and position allies itself to position. Among the poor it is a question of a wedding supper, and among the rich it is another sort of supper, but always—but never mind. Don't worry, Reb Alter, if you have failed to bring about a match between two young men; you will be successful on another occasion, for you acted, after all, quite properly, going about the matter like an experienced business man. Next time God will help you to ferret out a girl, the daughter of some moneylender or other prosperous business man. No matter whether she be blind, deaf, or lame, you will find a husband for her and your labour will not have been in vain. Would you mind moving a little farther, Reb Alter? You are perspiring well. It *is* hot."

CHAPTER VII

TWO JEWS DOING SOME BUSINESS

"WELL," said Alter, "anyhow, it is rotten just now." He was groaning and sighing, and big drops of perspiration were running down his face. He looked woe-begone, for he was just like a suckling child yearning for his mother's breast. Alter was anxious to conclude some business with me. How is it possible for two Jews with long beards to lie in idleness, without being active and doing some business? If two Jews were to be thrown upon some desert island, there is no doubt that in time one of them would open a shop and the other start some other business; both would barter, buy and sell, lend and borrow, and thus earn a living one from the other. And thus it was also the case with Alter.

"And what goods has your honour in his cart?" he queried at last. It was as much as to say: "Out with your wares, Reb Mendele." What could I do? A Jew is never lazy. I took out my wares, Alter took out his, and we began to exchange and barter. I tried to press upon him the books I was anxious to get rid of, books of poetry with short lines, but it was no good; Alter was not such a fool, and would have none of them.

"Rubbish," he said, "rotten merchandise written

by some poor sinners; Heaven knows what rubbish they have accumulated there in print. And who is going to buy such rot? No one will understand a word of it. No, Reb Mendele, show me something decent."

I produced some of my staple articles. Alter naturally found fault, but I could see that one article had attracted his attention. The pages were of different colours, covered with all sorts of types and characters, a text, commentaries, notes and footnotes, explanations and notes to the footnotes. It required hard brainwork and great mental effort to wade through the pages, but it is just what Jews like. Besides, the language and style were such that one could only grasp the meaning with difficulty and guess what the author was driving at; but that was just the beauty of the thing, for the less you understand the words and meaning of an author, the cleverer and deeper you think he must be. "He must be very deep," thinks the reader, "for I have not the faintest idea what he is driving at."

My Alter snatched up this article, and I could see by his expression that it was to his liking; in his opinion it was a best-seller. Thereupon we swapped prayer books for "Bovo-stories," [1] "Book of Prayers for the Dead" for "Thousand and One Nights," "Lamentations," for ramhorns,[2] *Hanouka* lamps [3] for wolf teeth, Sabbath candlesticks for *Habdalah-lights* [4] and children's caps. None of us had received

or even seen a penny in cash, but we were both very satisfied with the transaction. Had we not done business ? been active and not remained idle ? Alter's melancholic frame of mind had vanished like smoke, and you could read upon his countenance that he had entirely forgotten the fair of Yarmelinetz and his bad luck there. He was reckoning *sotto voce* upon his fingers, bending down his head and evidently listening with his left ear. One might have said that some invisible bookkeeper was sitting in his head reading aloud his accounts while Alter listened attentively. The accounts evidently showed that the transaction would yield a decent profit, for Alter's mouth stretched out from one ear to the other, and a sweet smile was playing in his thick moustaches.

In the meantime, the sun was beginning to set ; a nice breeze was blowing and clouds appeared in the sky, clouds which had been expected for some time, like some highly appreciated, welcome and honoured guests. Slowly the trees began to sway, bending their tops one to the other as if holding converse in their own language, and thus breaking their long silence. The breeze also woke up the sleeping corn, and the blades, like young children, woke up with a noise, bending down and kissing each other in a friendly manner. Everywhere God's creatures began to stir, in the fields, in the forest, and in the air ; one after the other birds appeared, perching upon twigs and low trees ;

they raised their beaks and intoned their song. Butterflies, richly clad in velvet, wearing modern-antique trinkets and jewellery upon them, started to dance, gliding in the air high up; two storks, giants, soldiers of the guard, with long red legs, stood upon the grass, their heads raised high, proudly looking down. A naughty little bird, a rascal, was frolicking and flying from one tree to the other, calling, "cuckoo, cuckoo," as if playing at hide-and-seek. Another bird, standing in the wheat and corn, was answering: "Picker-wick, picker-wick," as if saying: "You will never catch me; get along, old chap." Not far away in the forest a nightingale was singing, and everyone who had a voice was supporting the world-famous tenor; even frogs in the rivulets, and even flies; the beetle, the rascal, was also buzzing in its flight. It was a concert worth hearing; the whole world had become alive and looked friendly; it was a sheer joy, a pleasure, to listen, to look at, and to inhale the pleasant smell wafted from all sides.

"Reb Alter! It is good, Reb Alter! It is beautiful, it is soul-stirring, it grips one's heart. God's little world is beautiful. God's little world is alive! It draws one, it compels one to throw oneself into it."

"Reb Mendele, *bah*! Reb Mendele, fie!" said Alter with a grimace; "you had better remember that it is high time to recite the afternoon prayers; don't forget to say the special prayer for the fast-day."[1]

I buttoned my coat, pulled up my socks and began to recite my prayers ; my Alter—long may he live !—followed suit in his loud, raucous voice, and the two of us began to praise His Holy Name ; whilst all His creatures, the beasts and the birds in the forests, and the grass-blades and leaves were praising the Lord in their own way.

As soon as he had started his prayers, Alter had already brought forth a small barrel of tar, and even before he had finished he began to tar his wheels.

" Don't dawdle, Reb Mendele, cut it short," he urges me on ; " you look after the cart while I fetch the horses ; it is time we were off."

Alter soon went on his errand, and I began to busy myself with my cart. It took me some time, but Alter had not yet returned. The horses, I thought, must have wandered away into the forest. Thus I spoke to myself, looking at the setting sun. I waited for some time ; the sun had in the meantime set, and its last rays, descending from the trees upon which only a short time ago they had played so merrily, were bidding good night to the forest.

Fear suddenly stole into my heart ; perhaps Alter had suddenly felt unwell ; it is no joke after so much perspiration and such a long fast-day ; who knows, perhaps he has fainted, or someone has attacked him ; it is, after all, a forest. I cannot leave the matter alone, I must go and see what has happened.

I muster up courage, and with a stout heart advance into the forest ; I walk and search, but

all in vain, for both Alter and the horses seem to have vanished completely. I had penetrated deeply into the forest and at last came to a narrow long valley dividing the forest into two parts. The valley was grown over with reeds, and trees that pricked like thorns; one side was leading to the high road, and the other Heaven knows where. The forest is asleep, a dark curtain drawn over it from above. It is quiet all round, but from time to time one hears two small trees, near neighbours, whispering between themselves with bent heads, and tickling each other with their branches; somewhere a couple of leaves are fluttering, touching each other, as if something were worrying them and giving them no rest. It is the forest speaking in its sleep; it is dreaming of the day that has gone by, of yesterday with its joys and sorrows. The rustle of the thin branches and leaves means that the forest is dreaming of the young trees that had been cut down before their time; that noise as of something that had fallen down from on high. There was a nest with young innocent little birds which the blackguard, the hawk, had suddenly destroyed, and the leaves are just fluttering over the dead mother and her assassinated children, of whom the forest is dreaming. A cloud of sadness is descending upon the forest and is also gripping my own soul. Imagination, the juggler, the world-renowned liar, establishes a sort of business association, of export and import, between myself and the

valley in front of me at which I am gazing. I receive from the valley a load of goods, consisting of strangely horrible images, whilst from the factory in my head the same goods, manufactured in a different way, are dispatched, in addition to other things. One parcel of goods which I receive from the valley contains the dead body of old Yaknahaz and the bones of our two horses, carcasses. In my head the raw material I have just received is quickly turned into some new articles with many ornaments, sent back together with a red murderer, and a big wolf with terrible teeth.

And just as I am on the point of going down into the valley, a sudden thought crosses my brain : the wagon-booths, I think, are standing in the open field, and there is danger that little may remain of our scanty possessions. It is possible, too, that Alter has already returned with the horses and is now worrying about me. This thought is gradually taking hold of me, becomes stronger, and with it hope arises, so that it tears asunder and dissipates the cloud of sadness, and I feel a little brighter. Quickly I retrace my steps.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOST HORSES AND THE STOLEN CUCUMBER

THANK God, I have returned to the place I had started from without breaking a leg, although I had fallen down more than once, knocking against a tree in my hurry. A man who has slipped and fallen down in the midst of a forest does not feel so annoyed when getting up as he does in town, where passers-by are laughing at him. I therefore felt quite pleased and satisfied every time I got up again, and I praised the Lord that I had not come to any harm. And as the Lord was really so merciful unto me, I had a right to hope for further mercies and expected that on my arrival I should find Alter and the horses. So much grace, however, from His Blessed Name, I evidently did *not* deserve.

There was no Alter!

I stood dumbfounded, feeling sick at heart. Heaven knew what had happened to Alter, where his bones were now lying scattered; it was his ill-luck that was pursuing him, that was all. And now what about myself? What would become of me? My intention had been to travel down to Foolstown, to buy more "Books of Lamentations," for the approaching ninth day of the month of Ab,[1] the

great national fast-day, when Jews in their synagogues are reading the Book of Lamentations and weeping over Zion and the Temple destroyed and Israel in exile. The great day was quite near, and if, Heaven forbid, I delayed on the road, Jews in the little towns and villages would be short of the required books, and that would be a tragedy. Imagine! Ten Jews would have to read out of one book, because Mendele had suddenly vanished, gone, Heaven knows where. For the women it was not so important, for they can enjoy a good cry without reading the Book of Lamentations; and as long as they can shed tears they have done their duty.

It was a bad business all round, and I felt sick at heart. However, a Jew should never give up hope, nor should he remain inactive. It was my duty to do something, to go out again and to search for my companion. I looked at the stars; night had fallen, and it was high time to break my long fast. I took up my knapsack, and with a worried mind had a heart-to-heart talk with my bottle of spirits, pouring the liquid right down into my mouth; I then had a bite, only just to do my duty. I said good-bye to the bottle, another pull, and off I went. I am again in the wood and once more near the valley, but, let me confess, I am not alone this time, nor do I feel so gloomy as a little while ago, when I was there for the first time. We are two of us now, and I am discussing my present position

without any feeling of sadness. Evidently, when I snatched up the bottle in my hurry, after so much suffering, I must have taken more than one sip and gulped down a good portion of the contents on an empty stomach. As for food, I could not taste a morsel; it would have choked me. Now this additional sip proved a great help to me in my hour of distress, for it gave me courage and unlocked the gates of my eloquence.

Such is my habit, I am not ashamed to confess it, that whenever I have a drop too much, on some festive occasion, I become very loquacious, am conversing with the walls, am constantly smiling, am soft-hearted and pleasantly disposed. My body feels as soft as butter. It gives the impression of being divided up into many parts, into many parts of one Mendele, not knowing which is the principal, the essential part. At such moments I feel that I am not one but two Mendeles, one creeping towards *Yehupez*,[1] the other towards *Beiberik*.[2] My legs, too, then go astray, and do not know whom to follow. One is asking, and the other is answering. My words strike my ear like some echo, and my voice sounds somewhat hollow as if coming from an empty barrel. But I never lose my head, even on such occasions, and I remember things as in a dream.

"Good even!" say I, bowing my head and giving greeting; "whither are you going so late at night?"

"Fools, horses' heads," replies another Mendele, smiling sweetly, "you are anxious to get lost or

killed; upon my word, it is ridiculous! A pit, Reb Mendele, take care!"

"Quite right, as I am a Jew, it is a pit indeed! I think I must have fallen already about twenty times!"

"Well, then, get up; it is not decent to lie thus sprawling."

"Thank you, my friend, I am groping my way farther, whip in hand. Upon my word, it is funny, trees seem to be walking."

"Well, let them walk, who cares? Let us walk together, in company. Ah, no, that is not nice; don't scratch; what? again? another scratch—nearly blinded me."

"Spit at them, Reb Mendele, get rid of them; take the footpath which leads into an open field."

"You are quite right! Here I am; ah, the moon, the beautiful moon of Odessa, a nose with eyes. Hush. I must recite the blessing of the moon!"[1]

"Peace be upon you! Upon you be peace! As I am jumping but cannot reach thee, so may my enemies be unable to reach me![2] Mine enemies!" I suddenly begin to sob; what harm have I done unto them that they should constantly pursue me? Is it my fault that I am alive and am seeking to earn my living and to still my hunger? Look at my body, lean and emaciated. I, too, have had a mother who used to kiss and hug me; woe is unto me, but now I am an orphan, an orphan." I weep still louder. "'Sh!" I answer by way of

consolation, "it cannot be helped! Are you not ashamed of yourself, an old Jew with a long beard, with a wife and a good many children; are you not ashamed to stand here in the open, crying in face of the moon?"

"'Sh! quite right; it is not respectable, upon my word!"

"Well, then, be silent, the devil won't take you; you'd better look out, here is a hedge."

"Quite right, upon my word; as I am a Jew, it is a hedge indeed, for I have already come into contact with it and received a good bump."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"What you are to do? Get over it—thus and thus."

"Oh, thank you. Already I have both my feet in the orchard."

"Blessed be he that entereth; welcome, my friend, please advance, make yourself at home."

"All right, do not worry, I am advancing. Wonderful orchard, and what an abundance of beans, peas, cucumbers—plenty, upon my word."

"Take some, my friend, and say a blessing; don't be shy."

"Thank you! Cucumbers—quite delightful, very tasty. Ah! a blow! What meaneth that blow? Whence does it come?" The blow emanated from a big burly yokel who was clutching me from behind and thus giving me clearly to understand that it was not nice to steal into strange

orchards ; the blow also meant that one must not take cucumbers belonging to others in the middle of the night.

The blows, and perhaps also the cucumbers, had quite sobered me. For a little while I stood there quite bewildered, as if just waking up from sleep, and my first word was naturally : " Help ! " Soon, however, I collected my wits, and decided to pretend that I did not understand him. I therefore addressed the yokel in his own uncouth language, asking him whether he had not come across a Jew with horses. The yokel, however, took no notice of my questions, and dragged me along, pulling me by the sleeve, not sparing a kick from behind from time to time. He was shouting all the time : " Come along, come along." Well, there was nothing to be done, I had no choice but to follow him ; I could not be so obstinate and piggish, could I ? And thus we arrived before a house in front of which stood a carriage with four horses, and light was shining through the windows.

On entering the house, the yokel pushed me forward, whilst he himself remained at the door, cap in hand. What could I do ? I, too, took off my hat, scratched my head, looking somewhat bewildered.

At a table sat a clerk writing busily, his pen scratching horribly, constantly begging the owner to carry it to the inkpot for a little feed ; that done, the pen in its turn vomited the ink out upon the

paper. The little clerk was working hard, insulting the pen. Both, clerk and pen, were evidently dissatisfied: the pen on account of the clerk's heavy hand and orthographical mistakes, and the clerk on account of the pen's blots. In the middle of the room stood an official in a military uniform with brass buttons and a red collar, a corpulent man with an angry face. He was twirling his moustaches and talking in a loud and angry voice to two men who were standing before him with bowed heads, and observing a reverent silence. The official was angrily addressing them, shouting all the while: "You deserve to be put in irons, to be sent to Siberia, to be whipped. Has anyone ever seen such an elder of the community or such a police sergeant!"

I was more dead than alive, trembling in every limb. I did not quite catch the words and the accusations the yokel had brought forth against me, but when I awoke I suddenly became aware of the fist of the great official before my eyes and heard his abuse: "Thief," he shouted, "thief, pirate, smuggler, receiver of stolen goods, purse-cutter; prison, the knout, Siberia—that is what you deserve," and so on. He caught me by my earlocks, and suddenly espying a pair of scissors on the table he snatched them up and without more ado cut off one of my earlocks.[1]

A flood of tears was my answer. On the floor I saw my earlock, my grey earlock, which had grown

up with me since my early childhood and shared with me both joy and sorrow. My mother used to comb it and to caress it when I was a little boy ; it had been my pride in my days of prosperity ; it had prematurely grown grey, but I had never been ashamed of its greyness. We had both grown old before our time, on account of suffering, misery, persecutions, and unmerited hostility, although my earlock had done no harm to anyone. My heart was weeping silently, and, without uttering a word, like a lamb when it is being shorn, I was looking at my earlock, my grey hairs lying on the floor, and tears were streaming down my cheeks, one of which, the uncovered one, was flaming.

My face must have changed, and my countenance been very woe-begone and pitiful to behold, because the red-collared official had suddenly grown silent. He spoke to me in a more friendly tone, placing both his hands upon my shoulders. Under the brass buttons a human heart had evidently stirred. My grey hairs, my whole appearance, convinced him that I was no thief and no pirate, and, by way of asking my forgiveness, he angrily turned to the yokel, asking him what this fuss was all about. " Art thou not ashamed to drag an old man here for the sake of a paltry cucumber ? Get out, you idiot." Thus speaking, the red-collared official took up his cap, left the room, and soon we heard his vehicle rattling away.

In a minute all present became alive : the little

scribe threw away his recalcitrant pen, sending it to the dickens, whilst the two cowed and bowed figures straightened themselves up with a loud "Ouf!"

The peasants, when they heard of my misfortune, advised me to go to the inn near the village. "There must be a lot of people there just now," they said, "people returning from the market; there you might learn something about your horses." I picked up my earlock from the floor, put it into my pocket, tied a handkerchief round my cheek, wished the company good night and left the room.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAIR, OR CHAJA-TRINAH AND HER HUSBAND

The inn is surrounded by numerous farmers' wagons and carts, which are coming and going, some with nothing but a bit of straw spread on the bottom, others laden with utensils and all sorts of saleable articles, or bought in the market. On one wagon there is a pig hidden in a sack, poking out the tip of his nose into the air ; the grunts he utters reverberate in the distance and jar upon the ear. A dapple cow with only one horn is fastened to the back of the next wagon, which is laden with all sorts of earthenware. The cow is straining with all her strength to break away, to run home and see how her sisters fare in the stall, and announce the good news of her escape. Two big-bellied, broad-hipped oxen are patiently chewing the cud, with earnestness and intentness, careful not to interrupt their occupations, for they are quite accustomed to work and quietly to bear the yoke. In the meantime, the goat of the innkeeper has jumped with wicked design on to the crowded wagon ; she steals up to a bag full of something, puts her head into it, and, getting a mouthful of eatables, immediately withdraws it, sneezing and jerking her tail, chewing

rapidly, moving her jaws and beard at the rate of sixty moves a minute. Her eyes wander on all sides.

A village cur, thin and emaciated, lame in one leg and with a bushy tangle at the end of his tail, who has been living on charity in his old age, supporting himself at the dunghill of the community, comes limping, raising his eyes to the wagon and looking at it respectfully from a distance. Then he grows more daring, comes up nearer, and sniffs out from somewhere a dry bone, hastily limps away with his find in his mouth, stretches out on the ground and chews at the bone, holding his head sideways on his paws. A horse, fastened to the wagon, is standing idle and drowsy, his eyes open and his underlip drooping. Suddenly, getting tired of this occupation, he takes it into his head to cross over and pay a visit to a pair of oxen, standing opposite him, eating hay out of one stack, with the intention of being their guest at supper. On his way, however, the silly horse in his carelessness entangles his pole in the wheel of the other wagon, and almost overturns it. The horse of the other wagon, getting frightened, jumps out of his harness and kicks another horse, whereupon the latter rears, neighing aloud. Thereupon the goat, getting frightened, leaps down upon the cur, squeezing his tail. The cur, on his part, jumps up and runs, limping and howling.

With great difficulty I manage to wend my way

through the wagons, carefully looking round me in the hope of finding what I am searching for.

I enter the inn and only gradually begin to realise what is going on inside. The first to feel the life in the inn is my nose, for already on the threshold it is greeted by a nauseating smell of spirits, shag, and the perspiration of human bodies. When the nose has received its share, acknowledging the pleasant welcome with a loud sneeze, then my ears are called into action. A tremendous and deafening noise and hubbub of shrill, raucous, and hoarse voices, an almost unbearable grating, penetrates into my auditory organs. When my nose and ears have had their share, my eyes begin to work, wandering about in the semi-darkness and trying to distinguish the various objects in this densely-packed crowd. They soon perceive from a distance a long wooden table upon which a suet candle is burning with a red flame, surrounded by yellow-green-blue-grey rings, like rainbows in this hot vapour and pillars of smoke. Slowly there emerge from the mist, one by one, noses, beards, tufts of hair, complete faces of men and women.

By and by I perceive groups of people in various phases of intoxication, some of whom are still able to stand on their legs, having only four or five drinks to their account. In a corner two drunkards are hugging each other, mutually hurling insults and obscene words at each other out of sheer friendship and love. A woman, barefooted and clad in a short

petticoat and a low-necked embroidered blouse, is greatly enjoying the scene. Patting the two men on their backs in a conciliatory manner, she is repeating in a loving voice : " That will do, that will do ; come home." The two men, however, take no notice of her friendly advice, embrace each other still closer and finally fall down on the floor.

Some of the visitors are seated on long benches, partaking of drinks and food. Two yokels are drinking each other's health, evidently, as the saying is, " in high spirits," whilst another, a regular and faithful customer, is smoking his pipe and constantly raising his glass to everybody in turn, although no one seems to be taking any notice of him. And last, but not least, there emerges the figure of a woman, buxom and lively, with a sort of neckerchief upon her head. It is the wife of the innkeeper, who occupies the centre of the stage, and deigns to direct and dominate everything in the room. She thrones it on her stool, surrounded by barrels, glasses, large and small, and plates containing hard-boiled eggs, dried fish, and pieces of liver. Her tongue—and hands—are busy talking to her customers, taking either cash or pledges, or marking the sums due from various yokels by means of a simple system of rings and strokes made with a piece of chalk.

I am wandering about among the crowd like a stranger, trying to speak to one or to the other, but, as Alter usually says, nothing comes of it.

The crowd in the inn becomes less dense, people

begin to leave, and I now approach the landlady, holding my whip under my arm. I am doing this on purpose to impress her. Lady-innkeepers like coachmen and drivers and generously treat them to drinks and even to food, so as to induce them to stop at the inn with their passengers.

The whip was my passport and pleaded for me; I found grace in the eyes of the lady, and the following conversation ensued between us:

"Good evening!"

"Good year!"

"Where is your husband?"

"What good is my husband to you?"

"Just so."

"Say, perhaps I'll do?"

"Why not?"

Well, from one thing to another, we began to talk and I told her of the misfortune which had just befallen me, and of my critical, rather ugly, position. She consoled me with a sigh, leaning her head upon her hand, two fingers upon her cheek.

"Fancy it! fancy it!" and then another sigh.

I, to humour her, told her all about myself, who I was, whence I came, what my name was, and what my business was. She, in her turn, was pouring down her eloquence upon me, was telling me all her secrets, about her husband, the *Shlimmezalnik*, about her children and about the business. We began to talk more intimately and at last found out that we were related. Her name was Chaja-Trinah,

named after a great-aunt of mine on my grandmother's side. What a joy! She was now inquiring after my wife and the children, each one separately.

When her husband arrived she communicated the great and welcome news to him quickly in one breath:

"We have a guest, a very welcome guest, Reb Mendele the Bookseller, a relation of mine."

She concluded proudly, her arms akimbo: "What, you think you took me from a stable? Thank God, I need not be ashamed of my family. You ought to be proud of my people."

"There you have it," I thought, "let it be thus. Saul once went out in search of asses and found a kingdom; I went out in search of horses, and found a Chaja-Trinah!"

Chaja-Trinah's husband was a long-nosed Jew, with a flax-blond, scanty little beard, earlocks, and eyebrows. When he was keeping silence he was usually chewing his tongue, and before beginning to speak he, as a rule, first licked his lips. When bidding you welcome and saying the traditional "Peace be upon you," he used to mumble something unintelligible, and from his entire behaviour it was evident that he was a henpecked husband, greatly afraid of his wife and literally lying beneath her slipper. As I found out afterwards, he was known in the district as Hayim-Choneh Chaja-Trinah's, whilst his wife was called Chaja-Trinah the Cossack.

"And where have *you* been all the time?"

Chaja-Trinah begins her severe examination, addressing her spouse; "where have you been? Who has ever seen such a lazy beggar! There he goes and abandons his wife and household. Never mind, I may talk in the presence of Reb Mendele, he is a relation of mine; I need not be ashamed to tell him what a miserable wretch you are, a veritable plague, from His Blessed Name. Now look at him, how he stands here like an earthen image, chewing his tongue!"

"But—but you yourself sent me to Gabriel's to fetch a sack of potatoes," stammers the unhappy master of the house, licking his lips before opening his mouth.

"And the teacher, where is the teacher? Could not the lazybones have gone for the potatoes? No fear; he can eat for ten!"

"But," protests Hayim-Choneh, "but the teacher took the cow and calf to the pasture!"

"Better hold your tongue, chew it, rather," retorts Chaja-Trinah, looking angrily at her husband. Turning to me, she informs me of all she has to bear with. Had it not been for her the whole house would long ago have gone under, or been topsy-turvy. Her complaints are constantly interspersed with the refrain: "Never mind, I may tell you all, just as to my own father; you are a relation of mine, Reb Mendele."

I interfere, trying to patch up peace between husband and wife, and to plead Hayim-Choneh's

cause before his severe judge, Chaja-Trinah. For the sake of peace I am not averse to a little prevarication, and I accuse *all* men, myself included, telling the lady that one can't expect much from men who are bad and wicked from the beginning. I praise and extol to the skies all women, and above all Chaja-Trinah, the pearl of womanhood. Without her, I point out, the world could not have existed. My speech produces a deep impression upon Chaja-Trinah and she grows softer.

"Heaven send you health, Reb Mendele," she says to me, her face beaming; and turning to her husband, she gives him her instructions in a more amiable tone:

"Stop chewing your tongue, Hayim-Choneh! You had better wash the glasses and plates out of which the sons of Esau have gorged. Reb Mendele must be very hungry," she adds, rising from her stool behind the counter; "I feel it myself. What can one do, on a market-day? We are always late with supper. Please, we beg you, will you pass into our living-room?"

From the common room a door led into a dark little closet whence one door led into another little chamber, and a second door, to the left, into a quite spacious room, with small windows. Most of the window-panes were broken and patched up with small pieces of glass, whilst some had only one piece of glass in a corner, like the only remaining tooth of some poor crone. In a corner of the room stood

a table surrounded by long, narrow benches, whilst in another corner was throned a vast bed, with heaps of bedding, pillows and cushions, big, middling, and small, forming a veritable tower reaching to the ceiling. By the side of the big stove there was a large bench which was turned into a bedstead at night. The walls were hung with portraits, covered with cobwebs and dead flies. Underneath the dust, the cobwebs and the flies, I could distinguish curious and strange figures on the portraits: a *Misrah*[1] upon which were painted strange animals, half goat, half hare, half lion, half ass, half tiger and half viper. There was the portrait of Haman,[2] dressed up in the uniform of a non-commissioned officer, hanging upon gallows reaching to his shoulder so that you could never tell whether he was hanging on the gallows or the gallows on him; near him stood Mordecai, surrounded by long-nosed Jews with earlocks, holding glasses in their hands and on the point of drinking Mordecai's health. Poor Napoleon was also there, and the flies had left but little of him. He was hanging between Mrs. Potiphar, a rather ugly lady, simpering and ogling, dragging the chaste Joseph by his coat-tails, and a narrow, cracked mirror, from behind which emerged a dried-up *Lulab*[3] and old *Hoshaanoss*.[4]

A stout, broad-shouldered, stumpy, hardworking maiden with fat cheeks like pancakes was busy in the room. She had but little hair upon her head and two pig-tails dangling behind. She held her upper

arms down to the elbows stiffly, moving only her hands, shuffling along like a horse between two shafts. She was not walking, but shuffling, so as not to raise her feet, sending her head a little in advance to be followed by her body. She was shuffling along, bringing a tablecloth and plates, laying the table for supper. Chaja-Trinah whispered something into the maiden's ear; the latter turned round in her harness and disappeared, head first, feet following.

In a corner of the room several children, boys and girls, were quarrelling over a whining little pup. Chaja-Trinah suddenly fell upon the youngsters, distributed on the quiet here a pinch and there a cuff, snatched up the pup and threw it out. The children put out their tongues, gave the *fico* one to the other and hid in corners. Soon Hayim-Choneh entered, carrying a big dish full of cream; his wife took it from his hands and bade us perform the ritual ablution of our hands and sit down to supper. A youth, coatless and barefoot, clad only in a shirt, trousers and cap, rushed in full of glee. "The Rebbe (teacher) has caught a starling in the stable," he announced in a voice of triumph. The children stood there in silent wonder, and before they had time to say a word, in rushed a young man with a swollen nose and thick lips, who quickly washed his hands and, approaching the table, shoved a big slice of bread into his mouth, all in a hurry, without looking at anybody, as if he were afraid of

being too late and of supper being finished without him.

In the meantime, the broad, stumpy maiden, arrayed in her Sabbath clothes, shuffled in and sat down at table. Chaja-Trinah, pointing to the maiden, said unto me: "This is my eldest daughter, Chassya Grunah."

The company were eating at first slowly, behaving respectfully, taking up the spoon to the mouth and then laying it down, but soon the business of eating was carried on more briskly, more noisily; ten spoons were working frantically in one dish and quickly carried from it to ten mouths, each swallowing in its own way and manner. There was a rush, a hurry and flurry: *Whoop, whoop!* My new-found relatives were constantly urging me to eat, not to be shy, and I, too, was swallowing: *whip, peep*, in my own way. The young man with the swollen nose was not lazy, he was working for ten, until the bottom of the large dish became visible and the bird painted on the bottom appeared to view. The young man then laid down his spoon with a deep-drawn sigh. He now stared at the company with somewhat dull eyes, and suddenly, rising a little in his seat, stretched out a hand to me, uttering the traditional formula of welcome: "Peace be upon you! Your face seems to be familiar to me; what is your name?" I told him my name, and he jumped up in his seat in wonder and surprise. "What? Reb Mendele? Reb Mendele

the Bookseller ? *pss* !—fancy, who does not know Reb Mendele ? I had the honour of buying a *bensherl*[1] from you many years ago in Foolstown."

" Reb Mendele is a relation of mine," said Chaja-Trinah proudly, melting for joy ; and pointing to the young man with the swollen nose she added : " This is our teacher."

" Well, little Hosheeala," she said, turning to the coatless youth, " Reb Mendele will examine you ; don't be shy, never mind, the uncle will not eat you."

Little Hosheeala, one finger in his nose, looked away, raised his shoulder and said : " I am zhy, I am bassful."

" And how old is your little Hosheeala—long may he live ? " I asked the mother.

" My little Hosheeala—long may he live !—is turned thirteen, last spring," answered the happy mother.

" Well, little Hosheeala," said I, taking his cheek between my two fingers, " tell me what section of the Torah is being read this week ?[2] Tell me ; don't be shy."

" Tell him, tell him," the company was urging Hosheeala, who was staring at me, but keeping silence.

" *Nu*," said the teacher, by way of giving his promising pupil a cue : " *Nu*—B . . ."

" Beef," burst out the young hopeful, looking at his teacher.

"No, *Balak, Balak*," [1] I prompted the boy and asked him further:

"What message did Balak send?"

The teacher is licking his finger, thus hoping to give his pupil a hint. The boy caught it, for he exclaimed: "*To lick*."

"Who, who?" The teacher was urging the boy and feeling a little easier in his mind, thinking that he had brought his pupil upon the right road. Who?"

"The teacher," little Hosheeala shouted.

"You dull head," the teacher cried angrily; "who, said Balak, would lick?"

"The Jews," cried Hosheeala in a squeaky voice, "the Jews would lick."

"Yes, yes, the Jews, Hosheeala," said I, patting his cheek; "you know, you know."

The mother was very happy, and, her hands upon her stomach, she was almost swelling for joy; the father was chewing his tongue for satisfaction.

After supper Chaja-Trinah talked to me about my own business and my troubles. "In a couple of hours," she said, "my Yanko will be back with the horses, then you, Reb Mendele, will get on one and my husband on the other, and you will ride and bring your wagon-booths with the goods here for the present, and afterwards we will see. Meanwhile you had better have a rest; here is a bed."

"No, thank you," I exclaimed, "if I throw myself into this ocean of pillows and cushions it will be

difficult to get me out. Heaven only knows how long I may sleep there, and time is valuable just now. Another time, please God, I will pay you a visit with my wife and children, then I will take leave of you all and allow myself to be swallowed up for a long time by this abyss of pillows and cushions ! "

" We are insisting," said Chaja-Trinah graciously, " we are insisting on your coming to us for a visit with *all* your children ; don't forget to bring Yakhne-Sossye, your wife, either. Well, but take at least a pillow and lie down in the little room on the couch yonder and have a rest.

" Good night," she added, " sleep in peace ; don't worry, my husband will call you at dawn."

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE WITH THE BED-BUGS

No doubt Chaja-Trinah was a *kosher*, a good and pious Jewess, but the bed-bugs in her house were very wicked. They attacked me as soon as I lay down on the sofa in the little room, and a very fierce battle ensued between us. Both sides were very obstinate and worked hard, they with their mouths, and I with my hands; they were creeping, and I was jumping up. They were clamouring: "The sofa is our domain and our property; you are a stranger here, an alien, a foreigner; manners, Jew, allow yourself to be bitten by us." What could I do? I bit my lips and scratched myself; they were biting and I was scratching myself. I first tried to seek refuge upon the pillow, then I hurled the pillow to the devil, and down went the small bench with the jug of water prepared for my morning ablutions. The noise awoke all the brown cockroaches, who appeared on the scene in serried ranks. The noise was deafening, and the biting unbearable. At last, unable to stand it any longer, I jumped down from my uncomfortable couch and rushed up to the small window to inhale a breath of fresh air and to look out upon God's world.

Calm reigned in the blue sky, and the silver moon, pale and serious, was shining silently, as if plunged into deep meditation. Silence reigned everywhere, and the meditative moon cast a melancholy glance upon my whole being, gripping my very heart-strings. The moon called forth in me a wealth of emotions, and I began to think, to think not only about myself in particular, but about Jewish life in general, life full of suffering, of insults and persecutions, old and new. I began to sob like a little child at its mother's breast. "I have a great pain, mother dear. What a life!" I cried. "A life full of worries and suffering, and yet people are jealous of us and envious. In addition to our misery we are the butt of everybody who grudges us even the piece of bread we are earning in the sweat of our brow! Oh, mother dear, my heart is aching!" The bright moon was looking down at me with a serious countenance, and methinks that she was comforting and consoling me: "Hush, poor child," she was saying, "it can't be helped; hush."

My heart was aching, and a flood of tears escaped from my eyes. Leaning my head upon my arm, I wept bitterly, turning the side with the cut-off ear-lock towards the moon. Let her look, let her see how we are being treated by the world and by men! Lifting my eyes heavenwards, I wept and cried, as a little child, suddenly awaking from sleep, is crying in its loneliness; begging for pity and help, but no one hears, for all are asleep. No answer came to my

cries and to my weeping. The only answer was the barking of a little dog somewhere who, with head uplifted, was yelping at the silvery moon! But the moon continued in her movement, evidently caring but little about the barking of a small dog somewhere down on the earth! I gradually began to feel a little easier; hope and a feeling of consolation without words were beginning to steal into my heart. I was experiencing that feeling of comfort and consolation which a Jew usually feels when he has shed bitter tears and unburdened his heart before God Almighty; it is a feeling which renders man kind and benevolent, forgiving and reconciled to his fellow-men.

"And they, the little bed-bugs," I now thought, "are they, too, not God's creatures? Is it their fault if they are wicked and stinking? It is their nature to bite! They are not doing it out of wickedness, but because they, too, want to live and to exist. They can only live by sucking the blood of other creatures. Well, I must submit to the exigencies of the bed-bugs; let them bite; what can I do? Is there a Jew in the world who has not constantly had to suffer from such bugs in all shapes and forms?"

I leave the window and, uttering the words, "Into Thine hands I recommend my soul," throw myself upon the sofa and fall asleep. Dreams I do not care to relate, they are silly things!

I got up the next morning with some difficulty,

for great was the pain I felt in every limb. But necessity roused me, compelling me to leave my couch. Generally speaking, a Jew only lives and moves by sheer impulse; necessity is driving him, compelling him to run, to act and to work; but let the impulse cease for one moment, and he will lie still like a corpse. It is during his festivals and holidays that the Jew begins to feel his physical pains; it is then that he finds time to be ill.

Necessity roused me from my couch, necessity kept me upon my legs, and necessity gave me strength to mount one of my host's horses; necessity gave me an invisible kick and sent me off riding side by side with Hayim-Choneh, Chajah-Trinah's husband. For us Jews the first move alone is difficult, but once the screw has been turned and the mechanism set into motion, the Jew is moving on, onwards, onwards, going even where he is not wanted at all, much less has been invited. I soon felt quite fresh and energetic.

Now there is a Jewish proverb which says: "You can never appraise a Jewish soul." At the beginning, when I had met Chajah-Trinah, I was naïve enough to imagine that my hostess had been happy to meet me on my own account; she was happy because she had found a relation—and what a relation—a man who had to do with books. During supper, however, when I beheld the stout, short maiden who was already advancing in years and ripe to be led under

the canopy, I began to smell a rat. I began to understand the cause of Chaja-Trinah's joy and happiness; it meant that I could be useful unto her in the way of finding a suitable bridegroom for her eldest daughter, in bringing about a match; it even seemed to me that she had an eye upon myself. That was, of course, the reason why the maiden had been sent to array herself in her Sabbath-best. My suspicions were soon confirmed and everything became clear to me, thanks to the simplicity of Hayim-Choneh, who, during our ride, began to ask me questions about my boy!

"And thus," said simple Hayim-Choneh, "and thus, your boy has already turned thirteen and is not yet engaged to be married? At his age I was already a married man! Yes, I was. My Chajah-Trinah gives me no rest and no sleep at nights, but is repeating all the time: 'Find a young man; why art thou lying idle, murderer? Find a fiancé.' You have seen my girl; she is indeed a good housekeeper, will make a good house-wife, and it is perhaps high time she was led under the canopy? Hah! what do you say, Reb Mendele? You are a learned man, are you not? What do you say? I is high time? Is it not? My better half discussed the matter with me last night. She holds you in very high esteem, she does indeed, and everything comes unexpectedly. It is just a strange coincidence that you should have lost your way and have come to us. You were very welcome indeed. And thus, your

boy, as you say, is already thirteen—your boy, I mean ? "

Thus conversing we reached the place where our carts, mine and Alter's, were standing. I examined first my own cart, and, thank God, everything was in its place, nothing had been taken away or removed. I approached Alter's cart, and methought it also had not been tampered with. Scarcely, however, had I lifted the hood that was covering the cart and felt inside, when I got a terrible shock which sent me staggering first and then made me run away as far as my feet would carry me. Something was moving inside. In the meantime the covering was thrown back, and I beheld, sitting upon the cart, with a bandaged head—whom do you think I beheld ? Alter Yaknahaz himself !

CHAPTER XI

ALTER YAKNAHAZ MEETS FISHKE

Alter himself soon told us all about his escapade: what had happened to him, where he had been, whence he had suddenly come, and why his head was thus bandaged.

"Thus I was going in search of our horses; well, in short, there were no horses. Well, think I, no horses—well, what of it? They must probably have strayed deeper into the wood. There is good pasture in the wood and also shade. Well, why not? A man, too, is always looking for places where he hopes to be better off. Well, I am walking along, going deeper and deeper into the wood, you understand, but nothing is to be seen or heard! What is to be done? I think, a bad business. Suddenly methinks I hear a rustle on the other side of a valley, and without more ado down I run into the valley. In short, nothing. In the meantime, it is getting late, it is already dark, and it is an awkward business. Then methinks that I hear another rustle a little farther down; I turn down there, but again there is nothing. I am getting annoyed, you understand? What business is this? say I. In short, another rustle. There you have them, the

fine fellows, think I, a disease in their bones. Greatly vexed, I plunge forward and at last find myself between thick branches. Aha! say I, got them! What? Devil take it, a red cow; nothing but a cow that had gone astray and lost herself in the wood. And now what is to be done? I do not know where I am, but it would serve no purpose to stand still, so forward I go, trusting to God. I go forward and come to a fire which is already dying out. The grass all around is trodden out, and all over the place there are lying crumbs of bread, eggshells, pieces of cucumbers, skins of garlic and onions, and also pieces of rags. There must have been a big company camping here, think I, gypsies probably. This is a bad business, for gypsies are fond of thieving and are famous as horse-stealers. Suddenly methinks I hear a voice from a distance. Who knows, perhaps it is Reb Mendele calling for help. I begin to move on, faster and faster. At one moment I can hear nothing, then it is calling again, and the nearer I come the more terrible it sounds. Someone is calling for help. It is terrible indeed. Well, what of it? Nothing. I stick to my purpose and walk on; it can't be helped, but of course I am wary, taking care of my bones. In short, I suddenly see in front of me a sort of old inn, a ruin, 'standing upon a hen's legs,'[1] as they say. I didn't quite like it, and sheltering between the branches I am approaching it carefully. Finding a small pole, I clutch it, you understand, for greater safety. I sit

down, keep still and wait for happenings. Terrible thoughts crowd my brain, stories about robbers and highwaymen and Foolstown thieves. Suddenly another loud cry, a bitter cry of despair as if uttered by a man who is in great danger, and this cry is evidently coming from the ruin. The cry for help grips my soul, tears at my heart-strings and *carries* me away from my place of hiding. Before I had even become aware of it I was already standing in front of the ruin, not remembering how I had come there.

"One thought was constantly in my brain and a voice was whispering in my ear: 'It is one of your own people, one of your own. Who knows, perhaps it is Reb Mendele, who is in great danger.' Did I know where I was? Terror had seized me. Well, never mind, it is nothing. It may be my death, think I, but I must find out what is going on in the ruin. You see, in my own way I am a bit obstinate. Thus I go forward carefully, listening attentively. I hear a muffled voice and come to a crumbled-down wall. Without hesitating any longer I go into the house, walking on tip-toe, searching in the dark. Everything seems to be quiet and still. I take out from my pocket a box of matches, strike one with a hand that is trembling; but all in vain, the match would not burn. At last one match takes fire, and I soon hear again a voice, and the breathless cry of a man calling for help reaches my ear. The match burns out, and—well nothing. I grope in the

dark, creep along and fall over someone; my hair is standing on end; I assure you that I did not know in which world I was.

"In short, by the light of the moon, shining through a broken window-pane in a miserable little room without any door, I behold an individual, bound and fettered hand and foot like a sheep, pale and more dead than alive.

"'God has sent you here,' he says; 'quick, untie my bonds, because I can no longer stand it; the rope is cutting into my flesh and I am dying of thirst.'

"'And who has tied you up in that way?' I ask whilst taking out my knife and quickly cutting the rope.

"'A plague upon him,' says the individual, stretching his limbs, 'such a bastard, such a thief.'

"'A thief?' say I, looking sharply at the individual.

"'Yes,' says he, 'he is capable of anything; not later than to-day he stole a pair of horses.'

"I jump up in my astonishment, and, in short, I begin to question my man so that the truth leaks out and comes up like oil upon the waters. By the side of that fire which I had seen there had camped a company of *schnorrers*, fine fellows, and one of them going out for a stroll through the wood, had led away our horses.

"Having ascertained from the individual whom I had saved the way the beggars had taken, I hesitate no longer and am off in pursuit of them. My man

tries to keep me back, telling me what risks I am running. 'The bastard,' he says, 'is capable even of murder, and he is not alone, but accompanied by a number of beggars who are as wicked as himself.' His words, however, produced no effect upon me; I could not remain without a horse. 'My horse,' say I, 'or death. No matter what will happen to me, I must pursue the thieves and catch them. Time,' say I, 'is valuable; you stay here, and when, please God, I come back with the horses, I will take you with me and off we go.' Thus I say to the stranger, to whom I had taken a great fancy, and who was very sympathetic to me. Without more ado I get on my feet and off I go.

"The old ruined inn was standing hidden in the wood, near the high road whence other roads were leading to the left and to the right; to Foolstown and the province of Wolhynia on one side, and to the province of Podolia on the other. I turn to the right; I am not walking, but running. I am boiling with indignation, and my wrath is great. Had I had the thief before me I would have torn him like a herring. A fine job for me, after my unlucky business, to be stranded without a horse and without money. Well, nothing. My feet, however, begin to have enough of this sharp walk and refuse to obey me, whilst my stomach is clamouring for food. It is no joke to have fasted such a long day. One thought is constantly tormenting me: my labour and running are sheer waste, for the fine fellows must

already have travelled a considerable distance. I have only one hope, and that is of meeting some vehicle to give me a lift. But as my beastly luck would have it, no vehicle appeared, and when I came across one it was going in the opposite direction. Suddenly I hear a noise. 'Wheels!' I exclaim. 'This time I will offer all I have in my pockets and hire the vehicle.' I run forward, and perceive some vehicles which seem to be standing still. What beastly luck! Well, what of it?

"I come nearer and behold a few wagon-booths. Aha, say I, perhaps these are my fine fellows, the thieves. I go slowly, and perceiving a small wood, I hide behind the trees, examining the scene from a distance. There was no doubt, they were the horse-thieves. Surrounding a turned-over wagon-booth was a company of men, women, young and old, and little children, all ragged and poor, busily working, advising, talking, cursing and insulting each other. Women were shouting shrilly, and squeaking, children were crying loudly, and dominating this hubbub and babel of voices I heard that of a big, burly fellow, a red, broad-shouldered rascal, who was fuming and threatening everybody with his fists.

"'It is the fault of the new horse,' he was thundering; 'may it burst for a plague that it is. The whole way it has been straining sideways as if to spite us. What a find, these horses! Trusses of straw without legs or eyes, who can only gorge and snore. A plague

upon them!' Thus the red fellow was cursing and shouting. I raise my eyes, and lo! what do I perceive? Your horse, Reb Mendele!

"'Ah,' think I, in great glee, 'you are a clever fellow (meaning the horse); you have played them a trick, and no mistake.' And where is my own *Shlimmesalnitze*,[1] my old mare? My eyes rove round and soon discover my horse fastened to a wagon-booth. I look at the pole in my hand, take out my knife, and stealthily approaching the wagon-booth, walking like a cat, I cut the ropes, jump upon one of the horses and off I am. Well, what of it? Nothing. Unfortunately one of the company catches sight of me and raises the alarm. I see that the red fellow is running after me, helter-skelter, and I am afraid that in another moment he will catch me. I spur my horses; they are not slow this time and take the hint. Unfortunately, my mare entangles her feet in the reins of your horse, Reb Mendele, falls down, and there is a breakdown. The red rascal, murder in his eyes, is upon me in an instant, and a struggle ensues. We fight with all our strength, both silent, and both boiling with rage. Alternately the rôles change but, at last, I bring off a tremendous biff, a corker, hit him in the seventh rib, give him such a knock-out blow that he falls down and lies still. He is shamming, however, busy all the time to get at his knife.

"'Ah,' say I, 'would you?' and knock the knife out of his hand. He struggles to get out of my

clutch and succeeds in getting at my throat. Suddenly the tinkling of a bell reaches our ears; he gets frightened, for he is, after all, a thief.

"'Your damned luck,' he roars, 'that bell. But take this as a present.' Thus saying he bangs me on the head and disappears. I jump on my horse and ride away, and only later on, feeling a pain, I touch my forehead and—bah, discover a bruise. Well, what of it? I have had my way, after all, you understand, for the horses are here."

"Praise the Lord that it has ended so luckily," said I, embracing Alter in my great joy.

"Never mind," said Alter, "let the red one over there also praise God that I had not tasted food for twenty-four hours and that I was very tired; but anyhow, our horses are safe."

"And where are they, our lions?" I asked, looking around.

"Be patient, Reb Mendele," replied Alter. "Our man whom I had saved and with whom I have come back has taken the lions down there to water them; there is a river yonder and good pasture. Don't you worry, he is looking after them, whilst I myself, tired out, broken in every limb, had thrown myself down upon the cart trying to get a wink of sleep. Scarcely, however, had I closed my eyes, when you arrived, Reb Mendele. Now, thanks to the Almighty, I see you safe; but why is your face tied round with a handkerchief, Reb Mendele? Toothache?"

"You, Reb Alter," said I, "have come back, your

head bandaged and with a bump, whilst I have come back, my face tied up and minus one earlock; you have come back in the company of a stranger, and I have come in the company of Reb Hayim-Choneh, Chaja-Trinah's husband."

I introduced my companion to Alter.

Alter opened his eyes wide and looked at me in astonishment.

"What?" I asked, very astonished, "you don't know Chaja-Trinah?"

"Well," retorted Alter, also in a tone of astonishment. "Chaja-Trinah is Chaja-Trinah, but what has she to do with your earlock?"

"She is a relation," replied simple Hayim-Choneh, "my wife is a relation of Reb Mendele."

And as we were thus conversing, sitting upon the grass, there appeared in a distance our lions, skipping merrily, as if they were galloping. They appeared to me changed in some way since yesterday. They seemed to be lifting up their heads proudly as if to say: "Never mind, you may laugh at us, but there were people who found it worth their while to steal us. Never mind, in spite of all our drawbacks, we are not worse than other horses, and when it is a question of overturning a cart or of breaking an axle, we can do it just as well as other horses. Our misfortune is only that we are Jewish horses. Jews only promise to feed their horses, but in reality give them plagues."

When my horse came near me I greeted the

animal with a friendly smile and a pat on its head, saying : " You little rascal, you."

Soon there also came up Alter's new acquaintance, and when I beheld him I clapped my hands, calling out loudly :

" What ? Fishke ! If we were to mention the Messiah, he, too, would have come."

" Is it that Fishke, the Fishke of the vapour-bath of whom you have been telling me ? " asked Alter in great surprise.

" Yes," I said, " the selfsame Fishke of the vapour-bath. Well, peace be unto you, Fishke."

" I, too, knew you at once, Reb Mendele," said Fishke, answering my greeting.

" Your Fishke," said Alter, " deserves all our thanks, for had it not been for him we should have seen our horses as we can see our ears."

" And had it not been for Reb Alter," replied Fishke, " then Fishke would have died an unnatural and untimely death."

" I have heard all about it," I said ; " you tell us better, Fishke, how do you come to be here ? "

" It is a long story," replied Fishke, turning away his head.

I was examining Fishke for a while, looking him over from head to foot. The poor fellow was naked and barefooted ; his feet were swollen and bleeding, whilst he himself was sunburnt and as thin as a stick, skin and bones. My heart was aching when I looked at Fishke. He must have gone through a

great deal of suffering, I was reflecting, and, taking him by the hand, I said aloud :

" Your story can wait ; we will hear it later on, there is plenty of time ; for the present, you had better have a rest with us here."

CHAPTER XII

A LETTER TO CHAJA-TRINAH

A JEWISH author might have found plenty of material for a description of the scene on that morning. Here were four married Jews, lying idly on the grass, happy, silent and—unbuttoned. There was also a radiant sun sending out her rays, beautiful nature, a cloudless sky, dewdrops, singing birds, and little horses; what more do you require? The author might also have drawn upon his imagination and added a herd of sheep pasturing in the field, a running brook, crystal clear; he could also have supplied the company with reed whistles upon which they were playing a tune and singing the praises of the bride who is the subject of the "Song of Songs," like the traditional shepherds. The author would have had no difficulty in the matter of a beggar's bag, as there is no lack of them among Jews. But why should I waste my time in trying to imagine the thoughts of other authors? I prefer to give vent to my own thoughts.

Thus was I lying idly happy and content on the grass, contemplating nature. A feeling of satisfaction swept over my whole frame, and I expressed it by humming a tune *sotto voce*. I had no intention whatever of showing my vocal abilities and

giving a concert for the benefit of my companions. I was merely humming a tune because such is the habit of Jews whenever they feel relieved for a moment, or have put aside the worries of earning their living.

Hayim-Choneh, too, was humming a tune, and his countenance was beaming. Suddenly, however, he jumped up, stroked his goatee, licked his lips and thus addressed me:

"*Nu*, Reb Mendele, I think it is high time we were off, hah? What do you say?"

"Ah," said I, "you want to ride home? Well, I give you God-speed; ride in peace!"

"Hah! What do you mean?" said Hayim-Choneh in great amazement, "and what about yourself? Are you not coming with me? We have been talking about a matter of business, have we not? We have been discussing something, have we not?"

"How can I?" I replied, pointing to my companions.

"Let them also come," said Hayim-Choneh, "I invite them, I insist on their coming. My Chaja-Trinah is having curd-dumplings to-day for dinner and there will be plenty for all of us—of the curd-dumplings, I mean."

"Many thanks," I said, bowing low; "no time. Business before pleasure, if you catch my meaning. Give my compliments to your wife."

"God be with you, Reb Mendele," exclaimed

poor Hayim-Choneh; "how can you speak thus? My wife will ki——"

He was on the point of saying "will kill me," but thought better of it and hastily added: "My wife will not let me into the house should I return without you. You see, last night my wife discussed the matter with me, you understand? And she is expecting you, and so does my Chassya Grunah, you understand?"

"I understand quite well," said I, "but we must have a little patience. You see, I, too, have a wife and she also will *ki* . . . not let me into the house, should I conclude the business without first having discussed it with her, you understand? See what I mean? But what can we do, Reb Hayim-Choneh?"

Hayim-Choneh stood there as if I had boxed his ears; one could literally see how his heart was bleeding, and his countenance had become ashen. "I ask it as a favour of you," he said in a pitiful voice; "do come with me, or at least give me a note to Chaja-Trinah, a little letter, for my own words she will never believe; she will accuse me of being a *Shlimmezalnik*, as usual; she will, she will . . . you understand? Please write a few lines, Reb Mendele, and our teacher will read it to her; please, I beg you, Reb Mendele."

What could I do? I had no choice but to save a human being from the danger in store for him. That is to say, properly speaking, it was only just that such a husband should meet with his well-deserved

punishment, but if punishment is to be meted out to him, why should I be the indirect cause of it? I, therefore, took a pencil from my knapsack, tore out the first blank page of a prayer-book, and sat down to pen a missive to Chaja-Trinah; and thus I wrote:

To the renowned lady, my near relative, the pious and charitable Chaja-Trinah. May she live long, and enjoy good health. Amen.

Firstly, I beg to inform you that this leaves me in the best of health, thanks to the Almighty. May He, blessed be His name, not refuse us His grace also in the future, and may we constantly hear good news of happiness and consolation from each other, and may we all live in wealth and honour and enjoy a tranquil mind.

To your dear children—may they live long—I send greeting, and particularly to your eldest daughter, Chassya Grunah, I send my heartiest greetings.

I further beg to inform you that, thanks to His Holy Name, I have found my wagon-booth and goods quite safe, and that the horses have also been found, old Alter Yaknahaz having rescued the animals from the hands of thieves. If we have retrieved our loss, it was of course only by the merit of our ancestors, and a great miracle which we ourselves never deserved has been vouchsafed unto us. Your dear husband will tell you all the details, such as should find a place in the newspapers.

My dear Chaja-Trinah, I beg you to forgive me if I venture to plead the cause of your dear husband and to assume the rôle of his advocate. He is indeed

greatly worried and terribly upset on account of my refusal to accompany him home. Have pity upon him, be merciful towards your spouse and do not visit upon him my own sins. Let him not be punished because I fail to keep my promise. Your dear spouse is an object well deserving pity, for he did his very best to persuade me to come with him. He extolled to the skies not only yourself, his faithful wife, but also your daughter, to whom I send greeting. In a word, he has done all that can be expected of a loyal and faithful husband. You understand what I mean? And once more—you see what I mean? He even went so far as to tempt me with the promise of curd-dumplings and other delicacies. But, alas, business is business, and for the sake of business man must even resist the temptation of alluring cheese-cakes.

Besides, I, too, have a wife—you understand what I mean, don't you? Such matters you do understand, for what is a husband without his better half? I hope and trust to Him who lives eternally that we will soon meet again and, please God, we will partake in your house not only of cheese-cakes but also of honey-cakes.[1] *You catch my meaning, of course, but, in the meantime, I beg you not to let your husband suffer.*

I am sending you as a present through your husband a new prayer for earning a living (parnosse), *a prayer to be recited when lighting the Sabbath candles, and also the prayer of our mothers, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, and also quite a new prayer to be recited during the ceremony of* Kapparah-Shlagen.[2] *I am*

also sending you the "Pure Fountain," a book which every Jewish woman ought to know by heart. You will greatly enjoy this book, and so will your daughter. My dear Chaja-Trinah, I have a favour to ask of you. When your bed-bugs had attacked and tortured me, I had, in my agony, thrown off my socks and, on leaving your house, have forgotten them. Will you, please, hand over the aforesaid socks to your dear husband as a present from me?

I send you once more greeting, to you and to your dear children, and particularly to your eldest daughter. I beg you not to forget that your dear husband is nebbich,[1] *a suffering and patient individual and deserving pity. My whip, which I left in your small room, I give as a present to your house teacher; he will find it useful and handy.*

With my best greetings and respects,
Your true friend,
Mendele the Bookseller.

When I read aloud this epistle to Hayim-Choneh he was over-happy, and greatly enjoyed the literary style and the language of my composition.

"Wonderful!" he cried, "wonderful!" However a man could write such things was beyond his comprehension. "Oy, what language, life-giving, sweet as sugar," he was constantly repeating. "Oy, how good, as true as I am a Jew."

Thereupon we took leave of each other and he went home with an easy mind.

CHAPTER XIII

FISHKE'S STORY, OR JEWISH "SCHNORRERS"

ALTER and myself being rather tired and worn out in consequence of all that had happened during the past night, we both decided to get a wink of sleep before proceeding on our journey. Fishke took up the duty of looking after our horses in the meantime, and also promised to prepare some food.

"I have had a night's rest," said he, "and have slept like a man after a bath.[1] Reb Alter has had some trouble to wake me."

We, Alter and I, yawned, stretched our limbs and, lying down in the shadow under a tree, fell asleep.

Had not the sun been sending out her rays, which were scorching us, we could have slept thus till the late afternoon. When we opened our eyes we beheld not far from us a cheerful fire upon which a pot of potatoes, with an onion in it, was boiling lustily, sending out an appetising smell. There was also a fine sausage. We took a drop of brandy and sat down to our meal, praising Fishke's culinary skill and knowledge. His cooking we said was thoroughly Jewish and very tasty. Fishke was quite happy to hear our praises and replied with the traditional: "Eat in health; much good may it do you."

"Tell us, Fishke," we asked him, "where did you get the sausage?"

"Where I got the sausage?" said Fishke; "in my beggar's bag; I was lucky enough to save my bag from the clutches of the red bastard—may he burst!"

"Now tell us, Fishke, what has happened to you."

"*Atj*," said Fishke with a sigh, "there is a lot to tell; it is a long story."

"We have plenty of time, and the day before us is long," said I. "Reb Alter, we had better harness our horses and start on our way. We will drive along slowly and hear Fishke's story."

When our wagon-booths were ready, I invited my companions into my cart, but Alter pretended that there was more room in his, and we compromised by deciding to sit part of the time in his cart and part of it in mine.

IN ALTER YAKNAHAZ'S CART. FISHKE'S STORY:

"*Nu*, Fishke, fire away, out with it." Thus we encouraged Fishke to begin his narrative after we had persuaded our horses to make a start.

Fishke, however, hesitated, his eyes downcast; he was evidently embarrassed.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I feel somewhat ashamed. Fancy! Just to start and tell one's own story without more ado; it is rather unpleasant, and goes against the grain."

I encouraged Fishke, whilst Alter, in his turn, thus persuaded him :

" You little fool, it is only the beginning that is difficult, but once you have started and uttered the first word, then it is smooth sailing ; I know it from my own experience. However, that is beside the point ; you will soon see yourself that it is not so difficult as you imagine. Make a start, get along.

" And thus," continued Alter, " you got married to the blind orphan ; *nu*, this we already know. And what happened afterwards ? "

" Afterwards," Fishke suddenly flared up, waxing mightily wroth, " afterwards—may the unclean spirit get into their respective fathers, I mean my wife and the red bastard !—they have paid me out handsomely."

" *Nu, nu, nu,*" we urged on Fishke, who had suddenly stopped once more. He opened his mouth and at last proceeded :

" Oy, what a wife ! After our marriage we at first lived quite happily together, as a Jewish couple should live. Heaven is my witness that I did my duty, and, believe me, Jews, that I am telling you the truth ; may I be struck dumb if I am uttering a lie. Every day in the early morning I took my wife out and, as it was right and proper, led her to her accustomed place near the old cemetery. It was the place which belonged to her and where she was privileged to sit and beg, addressing the passers-by in the heartrending plaintive tone in

which the *Lamentations*[1] are recited in Synagogue and which is very touching. Several times during the day I came to pay her a short visit, bringing her either some hot food or a sour cucumber, a few berries and other delicacies to refresh herself. 'There, my wife,' I said, 'refresh yourself.' You see, she was sitting the whole day in the same place, her mind concentrated upon business! Sometimes I came just to see how business was going and to lend her a hand when there was a rush, to give change to some donors or to remind them of outstanding debts, when they felt inclined to pass by with a promise instead of paying down in cash. Sometimes I would drive away a cow or a goat which had strayed too near and shown an inclination to taste the straw my wife was sitting upon. In a word, I tried to make myself generally useful. During the month of *Ellul*[2] I led her to the great fair, at the outskirts of the town, where, like so many other Jewish *schnorrers*, she used to make a respectable and decent living, as the children of Israel are always ready to give—when they are told to. We made a good living and were not in want, but, alas, man is never satisfied, and when he has bread he is longing for cake.

"'Do you know, Fishke,' my wife said one day, 'people like me and you, I mean such a couple, will never be lost in the wide world. In our profession or business our very deformities are advantages. Others in our position and with our

assets in the begging trade would have made a fortune, but we seem to be two *shlimmezalniks* and are not doing what we ought to do. You listen to my advice, Fishke, listen to the advice of your wife, who is older than you and has more experience than you: take me out into the wide world, among people, to big towns, and you will see that we shall soon be rolling in gold. Here, in our native town, business is getting slacker every day, and there are days when I am sitting for hours before someone throws me a penny. People are saying how well *Lekish* [1] and his wife Pearl are doing. Immediately after their marriage they went on the road, and fortune is smiling upon them; Motel the *schnorrer* has met them at Kishinev, where they are going begging from house to house. Their beggar's bags are full of all good things, pieces of Sabbath loaves, smoked lamb, sausages and other delicacies, and Pearl is looking as well as well can be, her face as radiant as the sun. She has grown stout and has a face like a veritable countess. Fools-town, she says, she does not want to know, would not take it even if it were made a present to her. Other people coming from Odessa cannot tell enough of the fortune that has befallen Yontel, who used to crawl along in the market-place and between the shops. He is doing really well, people seem never to have enough of looking at him. Odessa, they say, may be full of cripples, for wherever there is a cripple he goes to Odessa. and the people there

are used to them, but none of these cripples can compete with those of Foolstown. Such cripples as are produced in Foolstown even England cannot produce, so people say, and they have a world-wide reputation. People are running for miles to get a peep at a Jew hailing from Foolstown. Believe me, Fishke,' continued my wife, 'God will not forget or abandon us; follow my advice, let us start at once, whilst summer is still in the land; it would be a pity to lose even a day.'

"My wife had thus whetted my appetite, and we went on the road.

"Well, my dear friends, thank God, we did pretty well. In every village and town where we called we were well received and no one refused us alms. The Jewish poorhouses were naturally open to us, and everywhere there were plenty of Jewish houses where, so to speak, we had only to enter and take, fill our pockets and our beggar's bags. The beadle of the synagogue used to take a few pence and send us, my wife and myself, to the same house for the Sabbath meals.

"My wife was in the meantime studying with me the code of begging and *shnorring*. I was quite a novice in the profession, ignorant of the tricks of the trade, its laws, customs and habits, whilst she was well versed in them and possessed a wide experience. She taught me how to beg, how to enter a house, walk on the stage, so to say, how to groan sigh, cough and make a woe-begone face.

Sometimes one must beg alms, but at other times it is advisable to *claim* them, and my better half told me when to pray, bless or curse the prospective donors. Ah, you imagine that it is so easy to be a Jewish beggar? You are jolly well wrong, then. Among us Jews to become a rich and wealthy man nothing but luck is required; impertinence, arrogance, and insolence follow naturally. It is quite a different matter to be a Jewish beggar, I mean a thorough Jewish *schnorrer*, for luck alone is not sufficient. A Jewish *schnorrer* must know many things which are absolutely necessary in his trade or profession. He must know his business thoroughly and obtain alms from the donor, however unwilling the latter may be to give. I and my wife, we belonged to the so-called infantry corps of beggars. You look surprised, my friends, but let me explain the inner life of that vast army of Jewish *schnorrers* who are swarming all over Russia. They are divided into various classes, into regiments and companies, like soldiers. There are many sorts of them, for they are almost numberless; but, devil take it, I am getting confused."

Thus spoke Fishke, and indeed his description was not very enlightening and he was evidently getting entangled. I gathered, however, from his words that generally the vast army of *schnorrers* is divided into infantry and cavalry, that is to say, foot beggars, or tramps, walking from town to town, and travelling tramps, such as are travelling

in carts and wagon-booths. The vast army of tramps and *schnorrers* is again divided into town beggars and field beggars, that is to say, urban and rural. The urban *schnorrers* see the light of day somewhere in a town, usually in Lithuania, whilst the rural *schnorrers*, or field beggars, are born in a wagon-booth, in the open field. They are, so to say, Jewish gypsies wandering about from one end of the world to the other. Their parents before them had already led that wandering gypsy life. They are always on the road, are born there, grow up, marry, beget children, multiply and fructify and die, always on the road. They are free people, free from all control and supervision. They pay neither rates nor taxes and have no communal duties; they also consider themselves free from religious duties; in a word, they know no master. Among the urban *schnorrers* may be counted many Jews who *apparently* have another profession, but who, from time to time, supplement their income by practising a little *schnorring*. Such, for instance, are a good many teachers of Hebrew, beadles, Rabbis, and other so-called communal servants who *take* whenever and wherever they can. They are half what they pretend to be, and half what all the other Jews with beggar-bags are. There are also some who are *schnorrers* in secret, really living on charity, although they appear to be earning their own living. There are also the so-called borrowing beggars. They are living on charity

under a pretext, that is to say, they never take but only borrow with the intention of paying back to-morrow.

" Reb Alter," said I, " remind me, please, should I have forgotten any class or sort of beggars existing among us Jews. I am afraid I may have omitted to mention one or the other in my list."

" Well, and if you have ? What then ? " said Alter, looking at me just as a man with a beard will look upon a silly youth who is playing the fool. " *Ouva*,[1] what a misfortune, he has forgotten such an important matter in his list ! And if one is not mentioned in the list one has no right to be a beggar ? What ? "

" Don't say it, Reb Alter, there is a hierarchy, a law of precedence, even among Jewish *schnorrers*, a sort of professional dignity and jealousy, jealousy of their social position. You must not confound one class with another. There you are, I have forgotten to mention Palestinian Jews, who are constantly coming to Europe to beg, and who would feel deeply offended if they were to be put on the same level with other *schnorrers*. Then there are authors, hawking about their own wares ; or their widows, hawking about their husbands' works. There are also communal *schnorrers*, or rather national *schnorrers*, that is to say, those who are travelling all over the world and pretending to collect money either for a community or for the whole nation ! "

"Ay, fie, Reb Mendele, for shame," said Alter in a tone of annoyance, and scratching his head, "I have really had enough of your *schnorrers*. As far as I am concerned, you could make your list as short as possible, simply including the *whole* nation of Israel in the terms of *schnorrers* and tramps. Let there be an end of your lists and nice classifications; you had better let Fishke continue his story."

CHAPTER XIV

THE RED BASTARD

"I AND my wife belonged to the infantry among the tramps and beggars; that is to say, we were walking, and you can, of course, understand that on account of my deformity we could proceed but slowly.

"Gradually my wife began to scold me, even to curse me, heaping abuse upon my head, and to reproach me with my lameness. She began to pretend that she had made a great mistake when she married me. It was she who had made a man of me, had brought me out, so to speak, provided me with a decent living, and I, I was neither grateful nor loyal to her, doing everything to annoy her. I listened in silence to her abuse, thinking in my heart of hearts: What can I do? Such, no doubt, is the way of wives, who, from time to time, heap abuse upon the heads of their innocent and long-suffering husbands, treating them to a few words of reproach and sometimes even to a box on the ears. And indeed, as soon as her anger had abated, she once more became very friendly and even loving, treating me with respect and consideration. Placing her hand upon my shoulder, she would say: 'Move on, Fishke,' and thus we proceeded, I leading, she

following. It took us a long time to reach Balta, and, unfortunately, we just missed the big annual fair, so famous all over the world. My wife was greatly upset over it and naturally maintained that I had been the cause of our being so late. She was very angry, as if she had lost half a million dollars. She would not listen to my comforting words of consolation.

"'Why upset yourself, my dear?' I said. 'What if we have missed the fair? The houses in Balta are still there, and we shall soon recuperate our finances by visiting the houses in this big town.'

"'Big town!' shouted my wife. 'Go to the devil, you and your big town; a nice town he has brought me to. May it burn down with you together. What good is this muddy town to me? I do not want it; you hear, you idiot? Choke yourself with your muddy town.'"

"Got it, Reb Alter," I suddenly exclaimed, "got it! I have just remembered another class of beggars and tramps: beggars-bankers."

"Wonderful indeed," said Alter; "what a discovery, *tze*, *tze*, *tze*! As far as I am concerned I do not miss them."

"One of these," I continued, without taking any notice of Alter's interruption, "one of these gentlemen, Simhele the Lively, is keeping accounts of all the houses in Foolstown. All the inhabitants are duly taxed in his books, and he knows to a penny how much revenue every house is to yield to him

in the course of the year. 'The houses,' he says, 'are mine, and they pay me rent; the whole city of Foolstown is my office.'

"Simhele's method is as follows: Every day he visits a certain quarter of the town, enters the houses proudly, full of dignity and self-possessed, not like a *schnorrer*, but a tax-collector, claiming taxes long overdue. If alms are given to him at once, it is well, if not, he is not in the least annoyed. 'Good morning,' he says cheerily, 'I will let the sum stand against you, and you can pay me at some other time.' Thus Simhele hurries from house to house, briskly businesslike, and lively. You must have heard, Reb Alter, the story of a Foolstown *schnorrer* who had given his daughter in marriage to a tramp of Teterivke and promised as dowry to his prospective son-in-law a certain district of Foolstown. This *schnorrer* was Simhele the Lively. You may also have heard the story of that other *schnorrer* at Foolstown who had once been invited to dinner at the house of a rich man. He came, bringing with him another tramp who had not been invited. 'My good man,' said the host, 'what do you mean by bringing here an uninvited guest with you?'

"'It is only natural,' said the invited beggar; 'this gentleman is my son-in-law, and I promised to keep him for a certain number of years.' This story is also true, and it was again Simhele the Lively who was the hero."

"As far as I am concerned," said Alter, "I don't care a hang for your Simhele the Lively. May he be a *kapparah* [1] and go to hell."

Turning to Fishke, he then asked him to continue his narrative.

"We did not walk in a straight line," Fishke proceeded, "but rather in zig-zag, visiting many towns. Thus we found ourselves one day in a town which I wish I had never set foot in. That is to say, I have nothing really against the town itself or its inhabitants, for I was treated quite well there and allowed to beg quite freely from house to house. It was, however, in that town that I met my angel of death—a disease into his bones!

"When we reached the town we found there stationed cavalry—that is to say, a gang of *schnorrers* and tramps travelling in wagon-booths. Great excitement seemed to be prevailing in the town, and the cavalry, seething with indignation, were swayed by a spirit of revolution. The cause was as follows:

"The younger generation, modern communal workers, had introduced a new regulation according to which only really deserving poor, the old, the sick and the cripples, were to receive alms. Healthy young men and women, they said, ought to work and earn their living. They maintained that the spirit of Jewish pity and kindheartedness was responsible for a great deal of mischief; it was the cause of there being so many idle beggars among the Jews, people who are too lazy to work and to earn an honest

living, relying on the dole which they are sure to receive from Jewish pity. These communal workers had established a sort of factory, and were ready to provide the tramps with work instead of the usual alms. The result was, of course, that the Jewish poor and the tramps began to avoid this town. The cavalry which we met there were greatly excited and disgusted with the new regulation and the order of things.

" ' What a world is this ? ' they cried ; ' where are Jewish pity, Jewish kindness of heart, Jewish *Rahmonuth* ? [1] Finished Jewishness ! '

" One of the tramps, a red-haired, big, strapping fellow—a disease into his bones !—was the leader of the gang, the cavalry officer, so to speak. His voice resounded above all the others.

" ' This town,' he cried, ' is a veritable Sodom, that is what it is. Why should the rich alone live in clover, like aristocrats ; whilst we, the poor, are working for them ? What is their wealth if not the work of others, the sweat of their fellow men ? No fear, they take care of their beastly selves, always urging others to work. A rich man is quite proud of his fine appearance, of his healthy constitution, whilst we poor are forced to hide our health, to be ashamed of it as if we had stolen it, for otherwise everybody is shouting : Why does not such a healthy fellow work ? I think it is high time to change the rôles. Let the rich now try to work and the poor be idle.'

"'You are right, Fayvushke,' cried his listeners, 'you are right. We, too, are children of Israel, and have equal rights with the rich.'

"Towards evening, happening to pass the synagogue, I noticed in the dark a great concourse of people going in and out of the yard. Suddenly a voice, choked with sobs, reached my ear—it was a pitiful voice that was really heartrending. Coming nearer, I perceived a poor, miserable, broken-down Jew standing near the synagogue yard, and holding in his arms a newly-born babe that seemed to be squalling and crying. He was nursing the unfortunate infant, rocking it in his arms, cooing and crooning over it and repeating in a voice choked with sobs: 'Woe unto me, woe and dark unto me! My poor wife died, leaving me with this infant. Woe unto thee, thou unfortunate orphan, woe unto thee without a mother. Ah, ah, ah, shah, shah, shah, hush, hush, poor little orphan. What can I do?'

"Greatly moved, the passers-by stopped and put something into the unhappy father's hand. His lamentations rent my heart, and, tramp and beggar though I was, I approached him, took out of my pocket a few coins, and stretching out my hand was on the point of giving it to the bereaved father, when suddenly, pinching my hand, he called aloud: 'Woe and dark unto *thee*,' laying stress upon the word *thee*, as if he meant me. Taken by surprise, I beat a hasty retreat and stood there frightened

and gaping at the mysterious beggar. The bereaved father turned round, looking straight into my face, and with amazement I recognised the red-haired bastard, Fayvushke. 'Enough for to-day,' he said, and pushing the infant into my hands he added: 'Hold the child for a while.'

"I now noticed that it was only a doll dressed up in rags, and it was the knave himself who had practised a bit of ventriloquism, imitating the voice of a squalling baby.

"'That is how you have to treat those Jewish fools,' he said, 'you must act and pretend, otherwise they won't fork out. Well, if they refuse to give voluntarily, you must make them do it, using craft. All the communal servants, all those who are living on the community, are pretending and practising deceit, and I, too, with my little orphan am doing the same. They are only cows which we are milking. Say *amen*, Fishke-boy.'

"Whilst we were staying at the poor-house, I noticed that the red bastard was paying considerable attention to my wife, making up to her and paying her compliments. She had evidently taken his fancy, and he was always ready to render her little services, to fetch and carry for her. He was doing his best to find favour in her eyes, strange as it may sound. They gradually became fast friends, quite 'thick.' They used to sit together for hours, he constantly praising her, paying her compliments, sometimes even going beyond the limits of decency.

She, he repeated, 'was just a woman to his liking, a woman he could be very fond of.' My wife would pretend to be shocked at his words, and cover her ears so as not to hear his compliments but all the same they pleased her, for she would laugh aloud at his sallies of wit. I, too, laughed sometimes, although the worm of jealousy began to gnaw at my heart. On the other hand, I comforted myself with the thought that in another day or two we should get rid of the fellow; we should each go our way, and never behold his dirty face again. What do you care for this chatterbox, this philanderer? I thought to myself. My wife, thank God is going *schnorring* with *me* and not with him.

"Whenever he tried to take hold of her hand she pushed him away, saying: 'For shame, I am a married woman, and, thank God, I have a husband to lead me wherever needs be.'

"On the following morning, after my meeting with the red bastard disguised as a bereaved husband with a little orphan in his arms, I went on my daily rounds alone, my wife having said that she was not feeling well.

"'I am not quite well to-day, Fishke,' she said. 'I am yawning and feeling tired; it must be the evil eye.' She remained indoors, whilst I went out on business, visiting the houses. I, too, did not feel up to much; besides, I was rather lonely without my wife; I missed her. I confess that ever since I had noticed how the bastard was paying marked

attention to my wife she had become dearer unto me. I was angry, very angry, and my jealousy was great, but, at the same time, I do not know why, it drew me to her as if by some magic force. I went on my daily round, but it was not as usual, it lacked *go*; I did it half-heartedly. I hurried and tried to finish my business as quickly as possible.

"When I returned to the poor-house I found my wife sitting in a corner with the red bastard, conversing with him in whispers. Her face was flushed and she was listening attentively to the beggar's words, a sweet smile hovering round her lips. When I approached her and asked how she felt, she at first started as if embarrassed, but soon recovered her equanimity. 'Do you know, Fishke,' she said, 'why I feel ill? It is on account of our tramping. The healing woman[1] has advised me to go to the vapour-bath and to try cupping. Anyhow, I am not going to walk any more. Reb Fayvushke here is good enough to offer to take us in his wagon-booth. What do you say, Fishke, hah?'

"The bastard was smiling and looking at me in such a way that I felt sick at heart. For a long time I remained silent, not knowing what to say.

"'Why are you silent? Why don't you reply?' my wife began to shout, waxing very wroth. 'You don't care a rap, of course, for my health; you would like to get rid of me, to drive me in my young days under the earth! But you wait, you villain, you

will pay for it and die a violent death. You hear, Fishke, I will pay you out, I will leave neither a hair upon your head nor a tooth in your mouth for this your behaviour.' When my wife started thus I used to feel cold all over, and on this occasion, too, I remained silent and miserable, not daring to utter a word. God alone knows how I was feeling and how heavy my heart was within me. What could I do? Head lowered and eyes downcast, I humbly said: 'Hush, hush, do not get excited; hush. We shall ride, why not?' 'Now at last you are talking,' she said, a little appeased, 'but why, when I am talking to you, are you standing there like a wooden image, not uttering a word? Our friend is so kind and so nice and is ready to take us with him, and you do not even thank him. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you lout.'

"What could I do? I had to express my gratitude to the red bastard."

Fishke grew silent for a while.

"Reb Alter," I shouted, "another!"

"What is it now, Reb Mendele?" said Alter in a tone of mockery; "another discovery, a new class of beggars? May God send you better discoveries; we have plenty of *schnorrers*, I assure you."

"No, Reb Alter," I replied, "I mean another Hayim-Choneh, Chaja-Trinah's husband, who is so much afraid of his wife. It seems to me that Fishke, too, was such another henpecked husband whom his wife often treated to a box on the ears."

CHAPTER XV

FISHKE RISES IN THE WORLD; OR, THE BLIND ORPHAN AND THE LEADER OF THE GANG OF "SCHNORRERS."

After a while Fishke continued his narrative.

"On the following day the cavalry made a move, leaving the town which they had declared to be a Sodom. They left with a great noise, shouting and cursing. 'May the town be burned down and only its ashes remain,' they shouted. 'May all the inhabitants die ten times a day of hunger, and wander over the face of the earth.' Three wagon-booths left the town, three carts full of men, women, girls and boys, grown up and little ones, among them being also myself and my wife. We had thus risen in the world, mounted one rung upon the social ladder, for we now belonged to the cavalry, or mounted *schnorrers*, instead of being beggars on foot.

"You may believe me, my friends, when I tell you that a new world now opened before my eyes in the midst of this gang. At first I felt quite jolly and interested, for I saw and heard wonderful things which it is quite impossible to relate in detail. I heard how the gang was making fun of the whole world and mimicking everybody; I heard them

relating in their thief's jargon their various exploits, how one had stolen a loaf, the other a chicken, the third money. The rich they used to curse to their hearts' content, just for a pastime. I can assure you, upon my oath, an oath I am ready to take in my praying shawl, that they hated the rich people even more than the latter hated them. The words 'rich man' were equivalent to leech, empty head, stony heart, brazen face, and the devil knows how many other ugly expressions. They considered it as a meritorious deed to play tricks upon the rich people, and they often did so. They continually cursed the rich people, wishing them all sorts of misery and misfortune, illness, disease, and suffering. By way of a joke they used to call me, too, *bourgeois*, or rich man, because I had often spoken in favour of the *bourgeois* or well-to-do people, had stood up for them and defended their honour. You see, when I was employed in the vapour-bath I used to know intimately many *bourgeois* or well-to-do people, and had thus been brought up among them; I used to serve them, watch over their clothes, bring them a bucket of water, hand them a glimmering coal to light a pipe or a cigarette.

"I often also used to hear how matches were being concluded among the members of the gang, how the young men travelling in and belonging to one wagon-booth were courting and making love to the young women travelling in and belonging to another cart. It was all very strange. The art

of disguising oneself and of acting a part was highly esteemed among the members of the gang. They often used to act parts. Thus, one would pretend to be a hunchback, the other a cripple ; one was a blind, and the other a paralysed, beggar ; one woman suddenly became dumb, and another lame. Real cripples, not artificial, such, for instance, as we both were, my wife and myself, they considered to be great and valuable assets. They often used to say that we two with our deformities were a veritable goldmine, for beggars of our sort, and should prove to be a rich source of revenue. Such deformities are nothing less than gifts bestowed by Him who lives eternally, blessed be His Name. My wife's deformity they liked even better than mine, as it was more valuable. Besides, they had great respect for the power of speech and the sharp tongue of my foul-mouthed wife, and were absolutely cowed when she let herself go.

" The red bastard, as I have already said, was always at the beck and call of my wife, paying her marked attention. He would fetch and carry for her and bring her whatever she desired, all the delicacies he could lay his hand upon, such as boiled peas, beans, plums, etc.

" But I was thinking to myself : ' Well, what of it ? You may go to hell, for all your labour will be in vain. Dance attendance upon her, fetch and carry for her, look after her, do what you like, she is a married woman, so there is no danger whatever

of her belonging to you. Now then, what else can you have in view, my fine fellow? Her deformity, no doubt. You think, she being blind, it would be easy to make money out of her. Well, there again your hopes will be frustrated, for she is going over the houses with me, with me alone!'

"But as I wished to endear myself to my wife, I made up my mind to become efficient in our trade or profession. I had already learned the art of entering a house, which is not so easy as one would imagine. It consists in assuming an air of discontent and moroseness when entering the house of a prospective donor, to claim alms not as a gift but as a debt due to one. To stand in the door is only worthy of a novice, for your really efficient *schnorrer* pushes aside the maid or the manservant and insists upon seeing the master or the mistress; he penetrates into the dining or even the bedroom, and haggles and bargains with them. I had acquired a really great efficiency in haggling and bargaining. The real *schnorrer* should never appear to be quite satisfied, however large the gift offered to him, or whatever it may be. If he is offered a piece of bread he should ask for a plate of soup; if he is given money, he should ask for a shirt, a pair of old trousers or a pair of socks. He must always show a dissatisfied mien, always be discontent, grumble and even curse, if business requires it.

"But what do you think the red bastard did? He began to plan how to get rid of me altogether.

He thought unto himself: 'My dear, Fishke, you may try, but you will never succeed; for as far as begging is concerned, I am a past master, an artist, well versed in the code of *schnorring*. Do what you like, you will never attain to my degree of efficiency and cleverness, you will never be able to hold a candle to me. If I have made up my mind to make money out of your blind wife, then your struggle will be in vain.' Thus he evidently thought to himself and at once set to work.

"He worked so well that soon my wife began to despise me and treat me in the most abominable way, insulting and cursing me continually. The red bastard managed to render me ridiculous in the eyes of the gang, and I was the butt of their witticisms and mockery. I became the scapegoat of the entire gang, who hurled insults at me, giving me various surnames and epithets. If I grew angry and upbraided them, they only laughed at me, saying: 'Look at the *bourgeois*, how gloomy and silent he is; he will soon break out in loud sobs.' And when in reality I did shed tears of annoyance, they inquired: 'Hello, Fishke, why so jolly? Why are you laughing? Look at Fishke, you people, how happy he is!' The red bastard was always there to excite the gang and add to my misery. Sometimes they even went so far as to chuck me out of the wagon-booth. I was compelled to run after them on my crooked legs, whilst the others were clapping their hands and shouting: 'Bravo, Fishke,

bravo, old man; dance, boy, dance; look at him, you people, how he dances; he is quite an artist and ought to dance at Jewish weddings.'

"One day the red bastard—a disease in his bones!—
—said: 'Do you know, people, what I tell you? Fishke is not lame at all, he is only pretending and fooling us all; you have only to test him, give him a shove in his sides, treat him to a good kick, and you will soon see how he will stretch out his limbs.'

"In short, my friends, they tortured me, and with regret I remembered those happy years when I used to dwell like a prince in the Foolstown vapour-bath and lived care-free, like God in France,[1] bothered by none."

"Then why did you not divorce your wife?" Alter exclaimed. "What has divorce been instituted for among Jews?"

"You are right," said Fishke, drawing a deep sigh. "I wish I had acted thus, for it would have been well for me and also for someone else, but I cannot explain what had come over me. I am ashamed to confess it, but the more they tortured me, the more I suffered, the more also I felt drawn to my wife, and would not give her up. Was it magic? or perhaps obstinacy on my part? I said to myself: 'If you, red bastard, are so anxious to break up my home and deprive me of my wife, then I, too, am obstinate. Just to spite you I won't give her up, but will stick to her, holding her fast with my hands.' And yet there was also

some magic force which drew me to her. I liked her, her appearance, her face, her plumpness and her rotundity. Often I had made up my mind to make an end and divorce her, but as soon as she had spoken kindly to me, put her hand on my shoulder, I became like wax before the rays of the sun; I became another man.

"One day, in a lucky hour, when we were going, my wife and myself, from house to house with an easy mind, I said unto her: 'Bassya, my soul, what will be the end of our tramping from town to town, like the lowest of the lowest beggars? It is beneath our station and dignity. In Foolstown we both had a name. You took me from the Foolstown vapour-bath; think of it, the Foolstown brick-walled vapour-bath, where such fine ladies, such lions, are constantly visiting, all of whom knew me so well. You, too, were well-known and respected in the town. And look what has become of us! We are wandering over the face of the earth in strange lands, in the company of a gang of low, contemptible tramps. It is really a shame!'

"'Would you like to return to Foolstown?' retorted my wife. 'If it pleases you, Fishke, you are quite free and at liberty to return to Foolstown. I am not holding you back; but as for me, I have no intention whatever to return to Foolstown. There are plenty of poor people and beggars in Foolstown, and the competition is very keen. Every day Foolstown produces new beggars and recipients,

and even former *bourgeois* are begging one from the other.'

" ' Well,' said I, ' I don't mind another town. Choose, my dear heart, choose any town you like, and we will settle there. What I am anxious for is to settle down, to know that this is our home, this our town, and these our houses and our permanent customers. When you have a steady custom you may expect some luck and prosperity; as the saying is : " Every dog on his dunghill." '

" Patting me on the back in a quite friendly manner, my wife, however, replied : ' Soon, Fishke, we shall settle in some town and no longer wander about. Have patience a little while, Fishke; let us travel a little more, see life and the world, it is so pleasant, so jolly.'

" Her ' soon ' was a long time coming, and in the meantime I visited many towns and suffered a great deal, and all thanks to the red bastard—blast him, a disease in his bones ! "

Fishke sighed deeply and remained silent. We allowed him to rest awhile, and he soon resumed his narrative.

CHAPTER XVI

FISHKE THE LAME AND THE HUNCHBACK GIRL

"In addition to the epithet of *bourgeois*, they had also bestowed upon me that of *recipient*. Of course it was the idea of the red bastard, curse him, who dubbed me 'Fishke the recipient.' To be called a recipient was considered an insult among the members of the gang, for a recipient was not a true tramp or *schnorrer*, he was the scourge of the profession. They hated recipients and were jealous of them. 'Your recipients,' they said, 'those respectable Jews, pious, praying, synagogue-visiting, psalm-singing hypocrites, are the vampires in our profession, taking the morsel of bread out of our mouths, whilst we are starving. All those recipients who are present at religious ceremonies are brandishing as their weapon the "Psalms of David," which they recite on every occasion. Had King David known in whose hands his Psalms would once fall, how these lazy, pale-faced beggars would traffic with his book and turn it into a source of revenue, he would certainly have refrained from composing his Psalms.' Thus to be called a *recipient* was an insult among the members of the gang, and I was known as 'Fishke the recipient,' an

outsider, lacking the true *esprit de corps* of the thoroughbred tramp and *schnorrer*.

" ' No, Bassya,' I heard the red bastard saying one day to my wife, ' your Fishke will never make good, he will never go very far or ever become a success. He will never be one of us, for he is a recipient—a recipient to the very core. He has it in his bones, and your travelling over the world will never complete his education, but prove futile. He has no idea of the code of begging, ignores its very elements, and much more the intricacies and finesses, the tricks of the trade which alone spell success. I am afraid, Bassya, that you will have a lot of trouble with your Fishke, and I am very sorry on your account. Ah, if I only had such a Bassya, as true as I am a Jew I would have made a fortune with you ! '

" Thus spoke the red bastard, blast him, and he gradually succeeded in his designs. My wife began to lend an ear to his calumnies, to his lies and accusations, and gradually drifted away from me. We were becoming strangers. The red bastard used other means to bring about this estrangement. He informed my wife that I was being rather friendly with a certain girl, a member of the gang, that I was paying her marked attention ! This was true to a certain extent, for among the gang there was indeed a hunchback girl whom I liked and with whom I used to converse very frequently."

"Aha, Fishke, a girl! What girl? Confess!" Alter and I interrupted the narrator.

"The girl," said Fishke, "was quite a stranger, an inmate in one of the wagon-booths. She had suffered a great deal in her youth, and was continuing to suffer in her present surroundings. I confess that I enjoyed sitting by her side and conversing with her. We used to unburden our full hearts one to the other and to seek consolation. She showed me sympathy and pity; more than once she had cried when she heard of my sufferings. Ah, if you only knew what sort of girl she was, if you only knew what sufferings she had undergone," concluded Fishke, tears welling up in his eyes.

We begged Fishke to tell us more about the hunchback girl, and he yielded to our request.

"As you are insisting on my telling you the story of the girl," said Fishke, wiping his eyes with his coat-sleeve, "I will do so, but you must be indulgent if my narrative does not run on quite smoothly.

"The girl was still in her teens when her mother had brought her to Foolstown together with a bundle containing her belongings and old clothes. She left her bundle at the house of an old woman, a sort of witch who was no doubt a broker—in servants. The two used to go out, leaving the child alone, cold and hungry. One day the child cried bitterly, begging her mother to take her with her, but the old witch silenced her. Turning to

the mother, she said : ' Heaven forbid, no one must know of her existence, it will harm your prospects.'

" A few days later her mother took her and quietly brought her into some kitchen where she had been installed as cook. She soon left this kitchen and migrated to another, and then to another, so that in a short span of time the girl had been an inmate of a good number of kitchens. Every time her mother moved into a new kitchen she would become more angry and cruel towards the child. Her father she had never known, for when at home he used to be a stranger, being always on the road, and since she was dwelling in strange kitchens she never saw him at all. Indeed, the girl would have quite forgotten the existence of her father, had not her mother reminded her of him fifty times a day. ' Curse him, that fine father of yours,' she would say, ' may he burst ; he has ruined and blasted his wife after the years of worry she had passed in his house, and now he has sent her away with a load upon her neck, his child. On account of this load I cannot remain long in one place, for who will keep a cook who has a child with her ? '

" More than once it happened that her mother's mistress would rush into the kitchen and raise Cain because, so she said, the cook had taken the fat of the soup to feed her daughter. ' It is a punishment of God,' she would scream, ' to have a cook who is blessed with a daughter, a cook who

thinks only of wasting our substance upon her offspring.' In reality, however, this offspring was sitting at that moment in a corner, silent as a little mouse, curled up and hungry. Her mouth was watering when she inhaled the smell of roast goose or liver. She used to suffer in silence, never daring to utter a complaint, a prey to the pangs of hunger, until her mother would remember to throw her a crust of bread or a bone that had been left on a plate from dinner. If ever she dared to utter a sound, she at once came into contact with a poker, a shovel, or an oven-rake ; mercilessly her mother would beat her on her head, her feet or her hands, cursing her all the while, showering curses upon her innocent little head. Thus the girl had passed her youth in the corners of kitchens, and from sitting constantly curled up and bowed down she had become a hunchback, poor thing.

" A couple of years later she noticed a young man who had become a frequent visitor in the kitchens where her mother used to reign. The mother was evidently fond of the young man ; she used to feed him from the best, stuff his pockets with all sorts of delicacies and often even give him money. Sometimes the young man would come late in the evening and pass the night in the kitchen, and at other times her mother would disappear, having first arrayed herself in her best and contemplated herself in the mirror. On these occasions she would leave the child alone in the kitchen. It

appears that the mother was thinking of getting married and was busy with her fiancé!

"One evening a strange man came and took away her mother's belongings. Her mother said good-bye to her mistress, and taking her naked and barefooted little daughter by the hand, left the house. She led her through the streets until she came to a side street, where she bade her sit down. 'Sit here, and wait. Jews will have pity on you.' Thus spoke her mother, and disappeared.

"The abandoned child remained in the street, afraid to move, as she used to be afraid in the kitchen. She was almost naked, clad only in a shirt, and a cold autumn rain was drenching her through and through. When passers-by asked her: 'Whose are you, little girl?' she invariably replied: 'I am mother's. Mother told me to sit still and to wait, otherwise she will punish me.' They shrugged their shoulders and went their way, until late at night a poor woman took pity on her and led her into her house. No one claimed her, and she remained with the woman, whom she called auntie, for some time, although she was far from happy. Poor herself, the woman used to send her out to do all sorts of things, so as to earn her keep, although she did not beat her. When bread was scarce, the 'auntie' sent the little maid out to beg bread at the doors of Jewish houses.

"One summer's eve, clad in a petticoat and a shirt, barelegged and bareheaded, the girl, sent

on such an errand, had strayed away from the place she now called home, and had lost her way. The sun had set, dark clouds had covered the sky, and it began to thunder and to lighten, so that the child grew frightened. Suddenly several vehicles full of people came driving along, and some of the travellers noticed the child.

"'Look here,' they called, 'here is a little hunchback girl crying.' One of the gang—it was the red bastard—jumped down and asked the child: 'Whose art thou, little maid?'

"'I want to go home,' cried the child, 'to my auntie.'

"'Hush, hush, little daughter, don't cry,' said the bastard. 'I will take thee to thy auntie.'

"Thus saying, he caught up the girl, threw her into one of the vehicles, and off the company went.

"And ever since the hunchback girl has been travelling with the gang of *schnorrers*, who are making money out of her deformity. Whenever they came into a town they used to station the poor girl somewhere almost naked and barefooted, commanding her to shed tears and sob aloud, thus evoking the pity of the passers-by, and to beg. If the girl did not play the comedy well and brought but little money, her punishment was heartless and cruel. She was beaten mercilessly, thrown out of the vehicle and compelled to run behind, tired,

hungry and cold. She told me that once, during the winter, on a frosty night, when the gang was stationed in some poor-house, she had been thrown out into the street and all her weeping proved of no avail. In vain had she pleaded and cried and begged the members of the gang to take her in, to give her shelter, and protect her against the cold and frost.

" ' Have pity, uncle, auntie,' she begged everyone of the gang—she used to call them uncle or auntie—' have pity and I will be obedient ; I will beg properly and bring home much money ! ' The members of the gang, however, they whose business it was to appeal to Jewish pity, had none for the poor suffering orphan. The frost was biting, and, numbed by the bitter cold, she fell asleep, and thus, more dead than alive, was found in the morning. She was ill for a long time after that night.

" Whenever the gang perceived on the road an approaching carriage, a nobleman, merchants or other well-to-do people, the hunchback girl was at once dispatched from the wagon-booth and instructed to run after the carriage or in front of it and to beg alms. Did the driver treat her to a taste of his whip, she swallowed it and continued her begging, for she knew full well that a stroke from the whip was nothing as compared to what awaited her, should she return empty-handed.

" It is impossible to describe the sufferings this girl had undergone in the course of her still short

life ; hell is nothing as compared to her miseries. I tell you that my blood boils when I think of this girl and her sad life. I am ready to lay down my life in order to save this child. She is such a lovable, kind-hearted dove, such a dear, sweet soul ! "

CHAPTER XVII

FISHKE FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE SOULFUL MAID

FISHKE's story put us both, Alter and myself, into a rather melancholy mood. Alter was rubbing his forehead with his hand as if something was biting him, muttering all the while: "*Atj, atj.*"

"Do you know what, Reb Alter," I said, "methinks, upon my word, that Fishke is quite gone on the hunchback girl, is in love with her; there is something at the bottom of it."

"And why should I deny the fact?" said Fishke. "I confess that I really began to love her out of pity; I was drawn to her and found great happiness in sitting near her and talking to her. What? Nothing, I assure you, just so, to talk to her, or merely to look at her. You could read her goodness of heart in her face, and when she was looking at me it was like a devoted sister looking at a beloved, unhappy brother who is in trouble. When she heard of my sufferings she was greatly affected and took it very much to heart. When I saw her eyes filling with tears I felt a great consolation and was quite happy, and it seemed to me, I really do not know what, but I thought unto myself: 'Fishke, you are no longer alone in the world, you

are no longer as lonely as a stone,' and my eyes were shedding burning tears.

"It is funny, but I did not care any longer so much for my wife, and I remained almost indifferent to her carrying on with the red bastard. I did not like it, perhaps, but it was not for the same reason as before. Sometimes I used to ask myself the following question: 'Now, Fishke, suppose your wife were to say to you that she had had enough of wandering about, and would be prepared to leave the gang and settle in some town; now, Fishke, would you be happy?' But I had no heart to answer this question honestly, for another question immediately crossed my brain: 'And what will become of the girl?' But listen to what happened. The more I became indifferent to my wife, the more she seemed to be attracted to me. Sometimes she would be quite loving, throwing herself upon my neck, so to speak, although at other times she would adopt her old attitude, and treat me in an abominable manner. I failed to understand what had come over her, but I soon learned the cause of her strange behaviour; I then understood what was making her so angry. It is a shame to relate it.

"One day we had come to a small town and, as usual, went to the poor-house. Believe me, I had already seen many Jewish poor-houses and was acquainted with their sordidness, filth, dirt, and stench, but I had never imagined anything of this sort. It was an old ruin threatening every moment

to fall down in a heap, and it only yielded to the entreaties of the townspeople who kept it on its legs; it was supported by poles which, as it were, served for crutches. The dirt and stench inside were unbearable, and the accommodation was less than primitive. It was here that the *schnorrers* arriving in the town, men and women, young and old, were offered a temporary home and were huddled together during their stay in the hospitable town.

"When our gang arrived in this town, the poor-house was already full, for, in addition to its being an hostel for the wandering, visiting poor, the building also served as an hospital and a home for incurables. The master of the poor-house was shouting and insulting the newcomers, telling them that he had no room, but they produced an argument in their favour. It was Thursday, they said, and they could not very well proceed on their way on account of the Sabbath. Our gang at last obtained permission to stay in town over the Sabbath. I tried to find a corner to rest in, but soon discovered that this was out of the question. I was too weak to fight single-handed against the mighty army that had fallen upon me, an army of cock-roaches and bed-bugs. I gave way to the enemy and prudently decided to beat a hasty retreat. Leaving the dormitory, I went out into the passage, a sort of hall or corridor, with the intention of passing the night there. It was dark and cold,

the wind was whistling and howling like some hungry wolf; pieces of straw and rags, carried thither by the wind, were dancing about in the darkness like some weird ghosts, whilst raindrops were trickling through the many holes in the roof and in the walls. I found a corner and, with a heavy heart, trembling with cold, tried to get some sleep. But my thoughts were keeping me awake. I remembered the days I had passed in the vapour-bath at Foolstown.

"'Oy, the bath,' I kept on repeating, 'oy, the bath; it was simply paradise there, so warm, so pleasant, so comfortable! How happy I was in that paradise; what more did I want? It was so nice, so comfortable, and the devil only has brought my wife, sent her to cross my path so that on account of her I have been driven out of Eden, like Adam of old, and am compelled now to wander over the face of the earth.'

"I tell you, my friends, that women are the cause of every misfortune that has befallen man. What is the good of them? Who wants them? They never bring you any good! But then again I remembered the hunchback girl, and I felt ashamed of my thoughts. 'The hunchback girl,' I said, 'is such a soulful maid, such a pure soul, and it is quite a pleasure to be in her company. It is so agreeable, so pleasant and so cheerful to talk to her. To the dickens with the vapour-bath; a thousand vapour-baths are not worth her smallest

finger. One glance from her eyes sends a pleasant warmth over my whole body! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Fishke!'

"Thus I accused myself. 'You are a sinner, Fishke,' I continued in my self-admonition, 'you are wronging women in your wicked, ungrateful heart, for indeed they are responsible for much happiness in the world; they have the power to make men happy and even to turn hell into paradise.'

"Such sweet and pleasant thoughts drove away my former feeling of bitterness, and I forgot my suffering. My corner seemed no longer unpleasant and lonely, and I no longer felt the bitter cold. I recited with fervour my night prayers, shut my eyes, and I began to fall asleep when a sudden noise woke me up.

"'Look at that bag of bones,' somebody was shouting, and I heard a noise as if someone was hurling something heavy into the corridor. 'Look at the lady,' the voice was shouting again; 'fancy the Countess Potocka, the fine and delicate lady who cannot rough it. The corridor is good enough for you, you dirty countess!'

"I recognised the voice; it was that of the red bastard—a disease in his bones! He was shouting for a while, hurling insults at someone, and then he shut the door with a bang. The moon had just emerged from behind the rugged clouds, had deigned to look down upon the poor-house and through the

holes in its roof and shed its light upon a human body, lying still and motionless. I was curious to know who it was, that fine lady, that Countess Potocka, and went up to the still form. But horror seized me, my eyes grew dark, and my brain began to reel when I beheld the countenance of the so-called fine lady. It was my hunchback girl, lying in a swoon and evidently hurt from the fall. I started to revive her, and as soon as she was beginning to come to herself I lifted her up in my arms, with superhuman strength, and with the haste of a man who is saving someone dear from a fire, a big fire in Foolstown, I hurried with my precious burden into my corner. I could have sworn that I was walking not on crooked but on straight legs, like other people.

" By and by the girl opened her eyes, heaving a deep sigh. My joy was boundless, and I felt like the beggar in those fairy-tales, the beggar who suddenly sees himself transferred into a palace and is sitting by the side of a beautiful princess. Quickly I threw off my coat and wrapped it round my princess, who was trembling with cold.

" ' Oy,' sighed the hunchback girl, rubbing her eyes and staring round in great astonishment.

" ' What are you staring at like that ? ' I asked her. ' Don't you know me ? I am Fishke ! Thank God, you are alive.'

" ' Woe and woe is unto me,' she said, heaving a deep sigh. ' What is the good of my being alive ?

I had rather be dead than enjoy such a life as mine. God, they say, is merciful; then why did He create people like myself who only seem to have come into the world to suffer and be tortured?'

"'You silly little girl,' I said, 'God knows no doubt what He is doing; evidently there is some purpose in His creating beings like you and me. He is the Father of *all* His children; He hears and knows everything. Do you imagine, my dear, that He is ignorant of our sufferings? He *does* know, I assure you. Don't you see how His moon is looking down upon us and shining into this miserable dwelling through the holes in the roof? Don't commit a sin, my dear, with your words.'

"She gazed at me with her wonderful eyes, eyes in which there stood tears that were shining like diamonds in the light of the moon. Never will I forget her eyes and her look at that moment.

"When I awoke early next morning, I saw my dear hunchback girl wrapped up in my coat, sleeping peacefully like a little bird. Her face was pale, and there was so much goodness upon it, so much suffering, and it looked so pitiful, that it rent my heart. Her lips were trembling and seemed to be whispering a prayer. It seemed to me that she was saying: 'Have pity upon me. Why are you torturing me? What harm have I done you? Do not make my life a misery, I have done no harm to anybody.' Her silent prayer gripped my heart, tears welled up in my eyes, and I cried bitterly.

"The first to come out into the passage was naturally the red bastard—a disease into his bones! He looked at me and at the girl with his thief's eyes, a nasty smile playing round his lips, and then went in without saying a word."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SABBATH GUEST AND THE ANGELS OF PEACE

Fishke suddenly remained silent and would not continue his narrative. Alter's entreaties failed to move him. He had flushed and suddenly seemed to have grown bashful, feeling ashamed of his own words. Hitherto he had spoken, as it appeared, against his own will; it had been some inner force that was driving him, and his mouth had been uttering words almost independently of his consciousness. But when he suddenly began to lend an ear to his own words, Fishke was almost surprised and felt ashamed.

It frequently happens with many of us that at certain moments our mouths open and our lips utter words expressing pure and noble thoughts; we are pouring out humane feelings and sentiments, like some fire-spitting volcano pouring out its fiery lava. Such an hour came to Balaam's ass, and suddenly his mouth opened and he made a rather fine speech. Such hours come, for instance, to preachers and public speakers who, as a rule, are talking rubbish, repeating their nonsense or reiterating the ideas and thoughts of others, but sometimes they, too, have their moments of inspiration. Involuntarily they utter a great thought,

and both their audiences and they themselves are surprised and stand agape, unable to understand how such an original saying could have escaped them. But once the moment of inspiration has passed, then the ass becomes again an ordinary ass, and the preacher and speaker ordinary chatterboxes, repeating their nonsense.

I was looking at Fishke, who seemed to have suddenly lost his power of speech, and I was thinking of ways and means how to set him again into motion. The only stimulant, I thought, in Fishke's case, will be the girl. I will draw him out on the subject of the girl, and he will once more let himself go. I started to talk about the girl, to rouse Fishke's interest, give him steam, so to speak, and whilst I was talking I grew rather excited myself, was carried away by my subject and finished up my speech as follows:

"Poor girl! How many innocent children are suffering in the world on account of the sins committed by their selfish parents. The folly of fathers who divorce their wives is the undoing of the children, who are thrown out into the world, like jetsam and flotsam upon the vast ocean. Such parents are criminals, for they are only thinking of themselves and care nought for their offspring, their own flesh and blood. The husband and the wife get married again, whilst the innocent victims of their folly remain miserable for ever."

I suddenly stopped short in my eloquent speech,

for I noticed that Alter had grown pale and was looking downcast.

"Oy," said I unto myself. "Oy, what an ugly mistake I have made in uttering such words in the presence of Alter, whom they naturally fit, and who has been hit by my insinuations." I was, of course, very sorry to have pained my companion, and silently I accused myself of being very clumsy and inconsiderate.

"Good heavens! Mendele, Mendele," I said unto myself, "it is really time for you to be a little more reasonable, not to tell your neighbour the truth, like a little boy. You are, thank God, a Jew with a long beard, and not a silly, beardless youth, and you ought to know better; you ought to know what is useful and good and practical, and be able to hold your tongue. Oy, your tongue will be your undoing."

I then and there made a vow in my heart to hold my tongue henceforth, to hear, see and be silent; in a word, to practise the virtue of all nice and fine people, a virtue which is very necessary if one wishes to get on in the world. "Henceforth," I said unto myself, "I will only praise people and thus make myself very popular." Before my mind's eye there emerged crowds of our saviours of humanity, friends of the people, whose countenances are beaming with benevolence, who are friends and comrades of everybody, who constantly rejoice in other people's luck, are happy to hug and kiss and

embrace those who are above them or may be useful to them, whose joy seems to be boundless when they are talking of other people's happiness, when they are wishing them joy. Tears are actually welling up in their eyes, and a happy smile is playing round their lips. Such people may be called the benevolent *uncles* or *aunties* of humanity. "Hail, ye uncles and aunties; henceforth I, too, will join your ranks and be an uncle to my fellow men." I liked the word *uncle*, and silently repeated the words: "Uncle Mendele, Uncle Mendele!"

Anxious now to make amends for my error, to wipe out the mistake I had committed, I began to manifest my pity towards Alter, to be very anxious about himself and his personal comfort. My solicitude knew no bounds, and I spoke words as soft as honey.

"I am afraid, Reb Alter," I said, "that you are not comfortable here; you are edged in in a corner of your wagon-booth, and your bones must be aching. I will tell you what—you had better come into my cart; I will arrange a very comfortable seat for you; we will take a drop of brandy and refresh ourselves, and you will be all right."

My Alter accepted my invitation, especially the part referring to the drop of brandy, and we all got down from his cart. I invited my horse to walk in front, whilst Alter's mare was to follow; we stretched our legs, got up into my own cart and took a drop of brandy. I was as sweet as licorice,

wished unto Alter all the happiness in the world, with tears in my eyes, just like a real uncle. I warmed up Fishke, too, gave him steam, excited his passion, so that his blood began to course faster in his veins and he was once more induced to continue his narrative.

IN MENDELE THE BOOKSELLER'S WAGON-BOOTH :

Fishke continued his narrative as follows :

" The next day was a Friday, and the synagogue in the little town was full of the visiting poor. They were jostling each other and crowding round the beadle, anxious to be sent by him to some householder as a Sabbath guest. They liked to be the guests of some well-to-do householder who kept a good table and whose good lady was in the habit of making a fat *kuggel*[1] for the Sabbath dinner. The worst houses in the eyes of these *schnorrers* were those of the communal servants, of Rabbis, readers, preachers, and so on, or of communal workers, because they knew from experience that these people like to feed well at the expense of others but treat the poor they are compelled to invite to their houses very shabbily. The presidents of charitable institutions and societies were also usually shunned by the poor. Such presidents, they knew, were in the habit of sighing, groaning, and weeping when remembering the Jewish poor, but as to feeding them when occasion arose, they offered them an

almost empty plate. To be sent as a Sabbath guest to such houses the poor considered as the worst misfortune that could befall them.

"The competition on that Friday was very keen; the beadle was losing his head and his patience. 'There are more *schnorrers* to-day,' he cried, 'than usual. Whence have ye all come? Like a veritable locust they have invaded our poor town, *nebbich;* it is a punishment from God.' He was shouting and thundering, insulting the poor, but the latter did not seem to care a hang about his insults. They continued to crowd round him, to jostle him and to call: 'Me, me, send me to a good house.' They shoved a few coppers into the beadle's hand, by way of a bribe, and what could the poor man do? He took the coppers, grumbled, but found for each a house where he or she would be a Sabbath guest and have his or her meals.

"I and the hunchback girl were standing a little aside. First of all, it was quite impossible for us to push through that crowd, and secondly, we did not dare to jostle our betters and superiors, to compete with the lions and the bears. You must know that even among *schnorrers* there are social ranks and classes, and the *poor* aristocrats are even worse and more unbearable than the rich.

"The red bastard was naturally the first and foremost and managed to get the best two houses, one for himself and the other for my wife. There was even no need for my wife to mix with the crowd,

for the red one only had to point her out to the beadle, saying: 'Please look at her, there she stands, the unhappy blind one, *nebbich*.'

"When the synagogue had emptied, and the poor had all gone to present themselves at the respective houses allotted to them, I and my hunchback approached the beadle and humbly asked him to recommend us also to some house where we would be the Sabbath guests.

"'Sorry,' said the beadle, 'I have nothing for you; you have seen the rush, and I have no houses left where you could obtain the Sabbath meal.'

"I shoved a few coppers into the beadle's hand, and implored him to have pity on two poor souls.

"'Look here,' retorted the beadle, 'I don't want your money. I have one house left, and you had better cast lots between you to whom it should be given.'

"'Send her there,' I said hastily, pointing to the hunchback girl.

"'No,' she cried, 'no; send him there; he is more deserving.'

"We wasted a long while wrangling and trying to persuade each other to accept the house the beadle was offering us, each refusing to follow the other's advice. The beadle seemed to like our altercation; he was stroking his beard and looking at us with a friendly eye.

"'Look here,' he said, 'after the evening prayers you had better stand at the door, and I will do my

best to interest one or two people in you; they might invite you as their Sabbath guests.'

"He kept his word. After the evening prayers, when the worshippers were leaving the synagogue, he approached two Jews and thus addressed them: 'I must apologise for troubling you again; I really dared not ask you again to-night, after having burdened you with guests for many a week. If, however, it be your good will, then I recommend to you those two people.' Saying this, he pointed at us.

"'Certainly,' said both the worshippers at once. 'Who would refuse to invite the poor to his table on Sabbath? There is one day in the week on which a Jew can breathe freely, and why should he not, on such a holy day, try and make others happy; why should he refuse to share the food God has sent him with those who are in want? We beg you, beadle, never to forget us and to send us a poor man or woman on every Sabbath.'

"The two worshippers, surrounded by their children, all clean and arrayed in their Sabbath best, left the synagogue, and we, the hunchback girl and myself, followed our respective hosts.

"'Good Sabbath!' With these words my host, on entering his house, addressed his wife who, arrayed in her Sabbath garments, was seated on a chair, her face beaming like that of a princess. A little child, as fair as a doll, was in her lap, whilst two little girls were romping about in the room.

" ' Good Sabbath, my wife,' said my host. ' God has sent us a guest for Sabbath, and I have brought him with me. I know,' he added, with a sweet smile, ' that otherwise you would not have let me into the house.' He then began to recite the hymn ' Peace be upon you,' addressed to the angels who are supposed to accompany every pious Jew on the holy Sabbath. And then, according to custom, the verses from the thirty-first chapter of the Proverbs, beginning with the words : ' A virtuous woman who can find ? ' Whilst reciting the lines, he looked at his wife and taking up the baby kissed and hugged it. Peace was reigning in this modest dwelling, and methought that I could really feel the presence of the angels of peace whom our host had just been addressing.

" I am telling you all this, added Fishke, because at that moment my heart, for some reason unknown to me, was yearning for the hunchback girl.

" The clean napery, the shining candlesticks, the lights, the glasses, the Sabbath loaves, the decanter, all spelt peace, good will, and happiness. My hostess was constantly heaping my plate with food and urging me to eat and not to be shy. The food was delicious, but my enjoyment was marred, for my thoughts were with *her*, my hunchback. Heaven knows, I thought, whether she, too, has found such a hospitable host and hostess. After supper the hostess asked me to stay in their house overnight.

" ' Let him stay here overnight,' she said to her spouse, ' we will give him a shakedown, and not let him go to that miserable poor-house.'

" Gladly would I have accepted their invitation and enjoyed a night's rest in clean and decent surroundings, but I remembered *her* and had to refuse. Thanking them from the bottom of my heart, I took leave of them. I called for the girl in the next house, and we both wended our way to the poor-house.

" The night was fine, the moon was shining, and it was a pleasure to walk.

" ' We are in no hurry,' I said, ' to reach the poor-house ; let us go for a stroll.'

" We walked on through quiet streets, until we reached some gardens, and the fragrant smell wafted to our nostrils was intoxicating. It was calm and still all around us, the inhabitants of the town, mostly Jews, having long ago gone to bed. We walked on to the outskirts of the town and sat down on the grass.

" Thus we sat for a long time, neither of us uttering a word. Suddenly the girl drew a deep sigh and began to hum the well-known Yiddish song : ' My father undid me, my mother worried me.'

" I looked at her and saw that her eyes were full of tears, tears which were slowly rolling down her cheeks. A sad smile was playing about her lips ; she was looking at me. Her smile went straight to my

heart, gripped it; my head was aching and my temples were throbbing. I do not know what had come over me. and for the first time words escaped me which I cannot account for:

"'My love,' I whispered.

"'Oy, Fishke,' she said in a choking voice, 'I cannot stand it any longer; if you only knew what I have to suffer from him.'

"'From whom?' I exclaimed; 'from the red bastard? A disease into his bones!'

"'Oy, Fishke, if you only knew, if you only knew!'

"I took her by the hand, I laid my other hand on her head and, with tears in my eyes, I begged her to confide in me, to unburden her heart.

"Covering her face with her hands, she leant over to me, and in a trembling voice, with broken words, with hints rather than with words, she told me of things which made me wish the bastard to go to hell, never to rise again even at the resurrection of the dead."

CHAPTER XIX

FISHKE LOCKED UP IN A CELLAR

Once more Fishke grew silent, looking both worried and indignant. Anxious to learn more, I urged him to continue, thus addressing him :

" You have not told us yet, Fishke, whether your hunchback maid was beautiful ; I cannot quite see how a hunchback could prove so attractive."

" What do you mean ? " exclaimed Fishke, greatly excited. " Whoever will talk of beauty in the case of a Jewish maid ? If she be beautiful then it is her own luck, she is beautiful for herself ; it is nobody's business. To tell the truth, the hunchback girl was far from ugly. She had a lovely head of hair, and her eyes—ah, her eyes—were like sparkling diamonds. All this, however, would have had no effect on me. It was her goodness, her great goodness of heart that impressed me so deeply. She pitied me, had been like a sister to me, whilst I—I pitied her, and I felt like a brother to her. That is how I felt."

" Well, never mind," said Alter, " be it as it is ; proceed, Fishke, and tell us the result."

" I had noticed long ago," proceeded Fishke, " that the red bastard was frequently pinching her

on every possible occasion. I used to think that it was the pinching of a wicked, cruel man who loves to beat and torture his fellow-beings. As it appeared, however, from her bashful and embarrassed confession, it was quite a different sort of pinching. It was an ugly passion-pinching. The red bastard was giving her no peace, was constantly making proposals to her, promising her golden mountains. And when his sweet words proved of no avail, he tried to subdue her with threats and menaces. He threatened that he would make her life a hell, and he often made attempts to take her by force. The result was a box on his ears from the girl, an assault which he repaid a hundredfold by increasing her suffering and by tormenting her beyond human endurance. Such scenes had been of frequent occurrence, but they had reached the limit on the previous night. She had scarcely lain down in a corner of the poor-house when someone had crept up to her stealthily and was whispering into her ear. It was the red bastard, who was thus addressing her :

" ' You are not comfortable here, my dear ; I know a nice quiet corner where you will be able to get a good night's rest. Come with me.'

" She thanked him for his kindness of heart, but preferred to remain where she was. Then he tried to threaten, and in his passion became a wild animal, a beast of prey. A box on his ears was his reward, and it was then that he had seized her in his fury

and hurled her out into the passage. What happened afterwards I have already told you.

" When the girl had acquainted me with this new phase of her moral sufferings we remained silent for a long while, neither of us uttering a word. All sorts of feelings and sentiments were crowding my brain and heart. There was rage, blind hot fury against the bastard, and there was pity, deep pity for her. But there was also something else, something that was nameless and which was drawing me to her, gripping my heart. Suddenly it drew me with an even stronger force, and I felt my heart going out. Taking away her hand from her face, I called out in a strange voice :

" ' My soul, my dear love, I will lay down my life for you.'

" ' Oy, Fishke,' she whispered, sighing deeply, and drawing nearer to me, leaning her head upon my shoulder. My eyes saw a wonderful light, and a feeling of well-being swept over my frame. I was talking to her, comforting and consoling her as if she had been my own faithful sister. ' Never mind,' said I, ' God will help.' I assured her that as long as I lived I would be a faithful brother unto her. She looked into my eyes, smiled sweetly, and lowering her head, said :

" ' I do not know why it is so, Fishke, but I now feel quite content and happy, and I want to live.'

" For a long time we continued to talk with light hearts. I expressed my hopes for the future.

" ' The Almighty,' I said, ' will help us, will raise us up and put an end to our suffering.'

" Suddenly we heard a noise not far away from us. I looked round, got up and walked a few steps hard by the fence where we had been sitting. In an obscure street I soon perceived the figure of a man busy with the lock of a cellar. I don't know why, but something urged me to go forward. And whom do you think I recognised ? None other than the red bastard. He had managed to open the cellar and had disappeared inside with the evident intention of stealing all there was, in particular the food prepared for the Sabbath day. A thought crossed my brain.

" ' Fishke,' I said unto myself, ' now is your opportunity to have your revenge on him, on your own account and on that of the girl ; fasten the door and let him lie there a prisoner, like a bear caught in a net. To-morrow morning they will find him, they will give him a good hiding and mete out to him the reward he so fully deserves.'

" I realised at that moment how sweet revenge could be ; it literally intoxicated me. With cat-like movements I hastily approached the cellar and tried to fasten the door.

" ' Let him lie there like a dog,' I was saying to myself, smiling happily. Unfortunately, however, before I had succeeded in shutting the door, which opened from the inside, it was suddenly pulled back with force, and I fell into the red bastard's arms.

"'Aha, Reb Fishke, it was you then who has condescended to busy yourself with the door. For *my* sake you even went so far as to break the Sabbath and to do some work on a Friday evening? I am greatly honoured and beholden to you. Come along, my little pussy-cat, let us get downstairs, where it will give me much pleasure to treat you to something decent.'

"Thus saying, he hurled me downstairs so that I nearly broke my neck.

"'And now, my respectable *recipient*,' said the red bastard, giving me a tremendous kick, 'first, take this as a small advance on account. It will enable you to have a little patience and wait until I have transferred to my bag the roast chicken, the dish of fish, and the calf's head jelly which, in my haste, for your sake, I had nearly forgotten.'

"A moment afterwards he treated me to another kick and then began to rain blows upon me:

"'Count, Fishke,' he was saying, 'take this and this—one, two, three, four, five—all this on my own account. And now count again; this is on the hunchback's account—nine, ten—I will teach you to hide with a girl in secret places in the middle of the night—twelve, thirteen. I saw you walking about with her in side streets and obscure lanes—sixteen, seventeen.'

"My blood was boiling.

"'Bastard!' I shouted. 'You are not worthy to mention even her name.'

"Saying this, I jumped up and began to fight him with my teeth. It was a fight to the death, for we both hated each other like hell. We fought, he with his hands and I with my teeth. But I had no chance against him. He tore himself away from me, and after squeezing me so as almost to choke me, hurled me away into a corner.

"'Thank your stars, and render grace to the Almighty that I do not find it convenient just now to "do" for you. But stay here, my little fish, and have a good rest until to-morrow morning. In the place of the *gefillte fish* [1] they will find a live little fish. Good night; have you any message for your wife? I will bring her word from you to-night.'

"With these words he left me, locking me up in the cellar. When I collected my senses, the first thing I did was to try the door, but my pulling was a waste of labour; it had been securely fastened from the outside. I was afraid to make a noise, whilst it was a bad business to remain locked up in the cellar. Terror and rage filled my breast. I was thinking of the reception I would get on the next morning when I should be discovered. People will come to look at the thief, and no one will believe my story. Everybody will consider it as his duty to treat me to a blow and to hurl insults at me.

"Such unpleasant thoughts were crowding my brain and giving me no rest. Suddenly methought that I felt something scratching me. I stretched out my hand and caught a rat. It quickly glided out

of my hand with a squeak. I jumped up in terror, and a cold sweat broke out over my body. Scarcely able to stand on my feet, I groped in the darkness, and my hand came in contact with a cold, moist wall. Leaning against it, I thought in my agony: 'Ruler of the Universe! What a miserable life is mine! Why art Thou thus punishing me? Would it not have been better if I had never been born? What have I done to be tortured so much?' My heart was almost breaking, and hot tears welled up in my eyes.

"'Lord of the Universe,' I cried, 'where art Thou?'

"I stood almost benumbed and bereft of my senses, not knowing what to do. Suddenly the noise of the grating of a door reached my ears; my eyes perceived a beam of light, and my ears heard approaching steps, as of someone stealthily descending the stairs. My hair stood on edge, and terror seized me. In another moment, I thought, someone will find me, and treat me as a thief. But whilst I was thus standing, trembling and holding my breath, someone was calling me by name in a whisper.

"'Fishke, Fishke,' the voice was saying, and lo! by my side stood the hunchback girl. I uttered a shout of joy.

"'Hush,' she said, taking me by the hand, 'come away from here quickly.'

"'My love,' I exclaimed, 'you have saved my

life.' I confess that in the exuberance of my joy I kissed her for the first time then and there in that cellar.

" ' Come away quick,' she said ; ' I will tell you all later on,' and thus she led me outside.

" In the street, as we were walking away from that fatal cellar, she briefly related to me what had occurred. A few minutes after I had left her she began to feel worried on my account and got up to see what had happened. Creeping along the fence, she saw someone busy with the lock of a cellar, and coming nearer, heard a well-known voice muttering : ' Now, my little fish, you can lie here, like a dog ; the door is fastened securely enough.' Terror seized her, and before she had recovered from the shock the red bastard had become aware of her presence.

" ' Ah, good Sabbath ! My pretty, my pious maiden,' he mocked. ' Nice doings that, walking about in the middle of the night ! Call yourself a decent and pious maiden ? Home, you hussy, home, you wanton ! ' Thus saying, he gave her a push and forced her to walk on. Carrying his fully laden bag on his shoulder, he kept his eye on her, forcing her to walk by his side, teasing, mocking and insulting her all the while. She knew that I was in a terrible predicament and was greatly worried on my account. Suddenly they saw a company of Jews approaching them. They were returning from a festive gathering, were talking merrily and laughing loudly. The red bastard who, against the ritual

law of the Jews, was carrying a bag on the Sabbath, turned into an obscure side street and made himself scarce, whilst the hunchback girl, availing herself of the opportunity, gave him the slip. She naturally hurried back to save me and to set me free, but imagine her grief when she lost her way. She knew that I was in danger, was ready to fly to me—and she had lost her way! At last, however, she found the cellar and set me free.

"'My dear soul,' I said, 'you have stood by me to-night in my hour of need.'

"'And you, Fishke,' replied the girl, 'you behaved like a dear brother to me last night; you remember last night, the scene in the passage?'

"We walked along, but suddenly we both grew sad, as if we had a presentiment of what was in store for us.

"When we reached the half-open gate of the poor-house, I entered first. But scarcely had I made a step when I beheld, seated near the gate, the red bastard in company of my wife, both gorging from his bag and enjoying themselves. As soon as he perceived me he whispered something into my wife's ear and disappeared. My wife immediately jumped up and let loose the sluice-gates of her abuse.

"'You good-for-nothing!' she screamed in a great fury, 'that is where you are passing your nights, walking out with a loose woman, with a worthless hussy! That is how you are showing your gratitude

for all that I have done for you! I brought you out in the world, made a man of you. You imagine you dog, that you will go off scot free! I will teach you, you and your wanton. There, take this, and this, you dog!' And thus shouting, she began to beat me.

"I tore myself away from her and ran out into the street. She continued to shout and to scream for a little while, then banged and locked the gate, shouting: 'Sleep in the street, like a dog!'

"The poor girl and myself stood in the dark street, not knowing what to do. Silently, without uttering a word, we walked away from the poor-house, not noticing in what direction we were going, and at last found ourselves in the synagogue yard.

"My heart was aching when I looked at my companion. What a life of misery was hers. It was the second night she was not allowed to have any rest. I was cudgelling my brain and thinking of some place where she could pass the night, when I suddenly remembered the ladies' gallery in the synagogue. When at last, with the help of God, we had climbed up a rickety staircase and, groping in the dark, had found an open door, we suddenly fell upon something soft. Some unknown beings began to jump up and beat at us. I was fighting for all I was worth, and in the darkness I caught hold of a beard! A beard—of whom do you think? A beard of a goat. The explanation was very simple. We had unwillingly disturbed the goats who were in the habit of passing the night in the ladies'

gallery of the synagogue. I apologised to the goats, politely inviting them to pass this night in the open and to make room for a lady. I, too, left the gallery, after bidding good night to the girl, and shut the door from the outside. As for myself, I went downstairs with the intention of passing the night on a bench in the place of worship.

"In the study-room or oratory, attached to the synagogue, I found a number of men, mostly recipients and men living on the community, stretched out upon the tables and benches, sleeping soundly like gentlemen. All were snoring loudly, and the sounds were manifold, as if each were anxious to outstrip the other. It was a veritable snoring-match, a nose-concert, but it was a pleasure to see how these people were enjoying their sleep upon tables and benches. I envied them in my heart of hearts. Huddling myself up in a corner, I went to sleep. It seems, however, that I am destined never to enjoy any pleasure in life for long. Only a short while had passed, when someone woke me up.

"'Young man,' a Jew was saying, 'please get up.' I rubbed my eyes and saw before me a number of Jews with earnest faces. They were the members of the 'Society of Psalm Readers'[1] who forgather on Saturday morning before dawn and read the Psalms of David. I had to get up and join them. With an aching head, yawning and stretching my limbs, I too, began to recite the Psalms of the pious King of Israel.

CHAPTER XX

FISHKE'S INCREASED SUFFERING

"After the reception I had met with at my wife's hands on that fatal Friday night, it became clear to me why she was behaving in this way to me. She was simply jealous. She was jealous of the hunchback girl and was furious because I was keeping company with the latter. The red bastard had informed her of our friendship, naturally exaggerating a good deal. He was thus hoping to induce her to give me up. But even *he* did not know the psychology of women, and had made a mistake. Instead of giving me up, spitting on me, and letting me go, my wife was boiling with rage. What! I had dared thus to insult her! Fishke was actually preferring the company of a hunchback girl to that of his own wife! It was unbearable!"

"Then the question arises," said Alter in the sing-song voice in which Jews read and study the Talmud, "then the question arises: Why she? I mean your wife and the red bastard?"

"You are evidently right," replied Fishke, "to ask this question, but this much I have learned in the vapour-bath in Foolstown, where you hear many discussions. There you may hear a man who

had never uttered a truth in his life accusing others of being liars; many a man whom you could never trust with a penny will call his neighbour a thief, whilst another who will never give away anything is calling another 'a pig.' It seems rather strange how people who are themselves liars, thieves, and pigs can coolly and calmly sit in judgment over their fellow men and accuse them of these very crimes. And the reason is very simple. Everybody thinks unto himself: I may, but *you* must not."

Thus spoke Fishke, and I was on the point of taking up the subject and of expatiating upon it, but Alter, who was anxious to hear the end of Fishke's narrative, interrupted me and begged Fishke to proceed.

Fishke thereupon continued his story:

"In the meantime my wife and myself were drifting apart more and more. She had become even more intimate with the red bastard, and both together, like a gentleman and a lady, they were going over the houses *schnorring*. I did not care a hang about them now, being constantly worried about the hunchback girl, who never left my thoughts. As far as I was concerned, my wife and the red bastard could both go to hell. Whenever I met the pair in the streets, the *schnorrer* looked at me insolently as if saying: 'I have duped you cleverly, Fishke.'

"I spat out and quietly went my way. What do I care, I thought, what good is she to you? She is a

married woman, properly fastened, and nailed up. You can't undo our tie, though you may burst.'

"An old man, a member of the gang, now used to accompany me on my begging tours over the houses, and he was making money out of me. He was an artist in the profession; no one could resist his woe-begone face, and all were compelled to give him alms. He used to point at me, saying with a pitiful groan: 'A poor unfortunate cripple, good people; we are father and son.' He used to urge me on to be alert: 'Show off your deformity, Fishke, my treasure. Groan, you dog, groan and make a woe-begone, pity-inspiring face; they will pay me well for your groans.'

"Of course he pocketed all the money, and when I once asked him for my share, he said pleasantly: 'What do you want money for, Fishke? You are yourself worth your weight in gold. May I live to see you, my little treasure, not only lame and halt, but sick, and suffering pains all over your dear body.' When I, nevertheless, insisted upon having my share of the money he was making out of me, he grew quite angry: 'What, you dare, you little beast, you impertinent imp? And why should I drag you about, you carcass, in my wagon-booth? Keep your mouth shut, you lame dog. I will tell your wife all about it. I do not know you and have no business with you; I only know your wife, who has handed you over to me.'

"'It is a bad job,' I said unto myself. I realised

that I was not a member of the gang but a source of revenue to them; they were leading me about as gypsies lead a bear. They had taken away my wife, and now she was handing me over to them, to these outcasts and thieves, as if I had been a bale of goods.

"I was now convinced that I could no longer live together with my wife, that our home-life had been broken up for ever. Then why, I asked myself, should I stay with the gang? I must run away from them, and this as quickly as possible. It was a sin to remain another day in the company of such thieves. I was beginning to feel ashamed of myself. What was I doing among such people, lazy beggars who recognised no duties and had thrown off every yoke; who despised work of any kind, knew not the worries of earning an honest living, but were sucking the blood of their fellow Jews whom they hated into the bargain. I must escape from them.

"Such thoughts were crowding my brain, but then I thought again: And what about her? How could I leave her alone and unprotected in the hands of that gang? A fierce battle was raging in my breast.

"On the one hand I heard a voice shouting into my ear: 'Fishke, for Heaven's sake, run away, run away from these wicked surroundings if you want to save your soul; run away into the wide world, into a purer atmosphere; shake off sin and wickedness, and your suffering will come to an end.' But

then another voice was whispering into my ear: 'Fishke, Fishke, you will have to choose, either to run away and be free from sin, or abide in this hell together with *her*.' I shed bitter tears, and, may God forgive me, I chose to abide in hell—with *her*. I remained with the gang.

"Only some time afterwards it occurred to me that I could run away from the gang together with the girl. But this I could only do after having divorced my wife. Otherwise, how could I wander about all over the world in the company of a strange girl? What would people say? They would think Heaven knows what, and tell ugly stories. There was only one remedy for my misery, and that was divorce. Divorce! it is easier said than done. My wife is a veritable plague from His Blessed Name. Should I suggest divorce to her, then she would refuse to be divorced just to spite me. Nevertheless I decided to work in that direction and to try to divorce my wife. Perhaps the Lord will have pity on me, I thought. For the present I kept my decision a dead secret, never breathing a word to anyone. I now refused to go out *schnorring* in company of any member of the gang. They were very angry, particularly the red bastard.

"'If you refuse to work,' they thundered, 'then go to hell; why should we give you shelter and drag you about in our wagon-booths?'

"'Very well,' I retorted, 'I will go if you will let me take my wife with me.'

"I did not mean it, of course, but I knew that the red bastard would never consent to let my wife go. I persisted in my obstinacy, hoping that, in order to get rid of me, they would persuade my wife to accept a divorce.

CHAPTER XXI

FISHKE MAKES UP HIS MIND TO DIVORCE HIS WIFE

" ' Bassya,' I said to my wife one day when we were alone together, ' Bassya, what is it that you have against me ? '

" ' Go to hell, Fishke,' was her reply, short and sweet.

" ' There you are,' I said. ' I am trying to be nice to you and you are always angry and at loggerheads ; " go to hell, Fishke.' Why ? "

" ' Then be seized by epilepsy for a change,' she retorted, turning away from me.

" ' Heaven send you health, Bassya,' I said kindly, ' it is really time you gave up your old manners. Forget your foolishness, and let us once more live together as God has ordained.'

" ' Go to hell, Fishke dear, go to hell together with your wanton.'

" ' Ah,' thought I, ' you had better go to hell yourself, you and your red bastard.' Aloud, however, I said : ' Bassya, dear, listen to me ; one must not use force against a Jewish daughter, as the saying goes. If you refuse to live with me, then we Jews have a way out : there is divorce.'

" ' Aha,' said my wife, ' he has a fancy for the

wanton ; he wants to get rid of his own wife so as to go off with his little drab. No, Fishke, I will see you both burst first. Never mind, I will pay you out. And as for your *Hzoufah*,[1] Fishke darling, I will have my revenge on her sooner or later.'

" My wife was getting into one of her tempers, and I took to my heels.

" Altogether I was in a bad position myself, and, on my account, the hunchback *nebbich* was also suffering. Our only consolation was at night, when we could steal away from the gang and have a heart-to-heart talk, unburden our overflowing hearts and comfort one another.

" On one such night we were sitting in a small town outside the synagogue. The stars were twinkling in the vault above us ; nature around us was calm and still, not a sound was to be heard. She was sitting upon a stone, hunched up, and humming the well-known song :

" ' My father undid me,
My mother tortured me . . . '

" Every word she uttered cut me to the quick. I comforted and consoled her as well as I could. ' Cheer up, dear heart,' I said ; ' a little more, and the Almighty will redeem us and raise us up.' I pictured to her our future life when we shall both have been redeemed. I described in glowing colours the big brick-walled vapour-bath at Foolstown,

where I hoped once more to be admitted as an employé.

" ' And if God will give me luck,' I said, ' I might even aspire in time to the position of Keeper of the Clothes.' As for her, she, too, might find something to do in the vapour-bath, and if not, there were plenty of ways of earning a living in Foolstown. For poor people Foolstown was a veritable Canaan.

" ' It is a big town, with plenty of houses,' I said, ' and the people there are simple, standing on no ceremony. Everybody does what he likes, and no one finds fault with him. Thus, for instance, you might see at Foolstown a well-to-do householder walking about in ragged clothes or in a bedraggled, dirty dressing-gown, unbuttoned—and yet no one will think it strange. On the other hand, poor people are often seen arrayed in silk and velvet, and again no one seems to object to this. In short, there is scarcely any difference at Foolstown between rich and poor, as far as dress and manners are concerned. It often happens that the presidents of charitable institutions are themselves very poor and are drawing their income from the institution, together with the rich, one helping the other, living peacefully together. Poverty is no disgrace at Foolstown. I know plenty of people who only a short while ago had been in a lowly station of life and now are communal workers, even leaders of the community.

" ' I, too, your Fishke,' I continued, ' your ragged

beggar, may one day blossom out as a communal worker, and then, my dear soul, we shall live in wealth, honour, and happiness. Do not laugh, my dear, my imagination is not running away with me. In Foolstown such things are of daily occurrence. All you need have is implicit faith, trust in the Almighty, not to lose heart, and be—a Jew.

" 'Ah, Foolstown, Foolstown,' I said, 'how I yearn for the time when I shall be redeemed from bondage and return unto thee, O mother Foolstown!'

" 'Oy, Fishke,' said the girl, heaving a deep sigh and laying her head upon my shoulder, 'I can no longer stand this life.'

" Her countenance expressed a heartfelt prayer. I caressed her, comforted and consoled her as well as I could. She grew a little more cheerful, and looking me straight in the eyes, smiling sweetly, she said almost in a whisper:

" 'Fishke, you are now all I have in the world; you are my father, my brother, my friend, my everything. Fishke, you must never forget me, but always remain faithful to me. Swear unto me by this synagogue, where at this moment, as we believe, the dead are praying.[1] Among them may be my own father, whom I knew but little; may he be our witness that you will for ever remain faithful unto me.'

" I now began to talk seriously to my wife on the matter of divorce, and at last she consented on the

following conditions: All the ready cash I was possessed of I should at once hand over to her. Moreover, I promised to allow the gang to make use of me during the coming winter, to lead me about like a bear and make money out of me. All the money they would thus collect should belong to my wife, according to her marriage contract. The red bastard was a witness of our arrangement, gave me a kick and cried '*Mazoltov*.'[1]

"Winter passed, and after Passover we came to a town in the province of Kherson. Here I felt that I had fulfilled my part of the bargain. I therefore cried: 'Enough!' My wife was still raising objections, asked for a day or two to think the matter over, but at last consented to our divorce. It was to take place on the morrow.

"I was happy, and a wonderful light shone in my eyes. In my joy I went out for a walk, and on my way I did a little *schnorring* on my own account.

"'Why not?' I thought; 'a little ready cash will come in handy.' Business was brisk on that day, and luck seemed to favour me. When God once helps one of His creatures there is no end to His benevolence and favours. Such luck as I had on that day may happen to a man only once in a century. In no house that I visited on that day did the people send me away empty-handed. In one house at which I called they were just celebrating the ceremony of circumcision, and the guests were in a festive mood. I was treated to a drink and to

a piece of honey-cake, besides other delicacies, and I also received some money.

"I did not touch either the honey-cake or the delicacies, but kept them for *her*, for my hunchback girl. To-night, I thought, when the members of the gang are asleep, I will give it to her. Let her also enjoy life, and taste its sweets, let her know that her Fishke is a decent chap, constantly thinking of her and of her welfare. She is dear unto him as the apple of his eye, and he will rather go hungry himself than touch the morsel destined for her. I pictured to myself how we shall both be seated under the wall of the synagogue, and I shall be saying: 'Enjoy the honey-cake, my dear soul. It is a great omen, for to-morrow I shall be released from the bonds that bind me to my wife.' I will then tell her the good news and outline to her my plan for our future life. We shall both run away from the gang, and then everything will be all right. With such pleasant thoughts I wended my way towards the Jewish poor-house. A woman carrying two buckets full of water crossed my way, and this is supposed to be a good omen.[1]

"But, alas, woe and woe is unto me! If a misfortune is in store for you, even ten water-carriers with full buckets are of no avail! When I reached the poor-house in the evening, I found that the gang had left, taking with them both my wife and the hunchback girl. That was the bastard's doing, who had thus arranged it to take to the road

and leave me behind. I felt like one stunned; the universe had suddenly grown dark, all light having gone out of it; my only star had suddenly disappeared from my firmament. Gone was my hunchback girl. Once more I was alone and miserable. And where was she now? To whom will she now be able to unburden her heart? Oy, Jews, I suffered both for myself and for her.

"When a little later I took out of my pocket the piece of honey-cake which I had been keeping for her, my heart nearly broke, and my eyes shed bitter tears. I fondled the honey-cake, gazing upon it as if it had been something particularly precious.

"I kissed it as a fond mother might kiss the souvenir of her only child.

"'Poor, unhappy dear,' I cried, 'you did not have the chance to taste the bit of cake you so well deserved.'

"I put it back into my pocket, often touched it, pressing it to my heart. I really do not know what had come over me."

CHAPTER XXII

FISHKE VISITS ODESSA

When Fishke had uttered these last words he covered up his face with his hands, and turning away his head, sobbed aloud. We both, Alter and I, felt very melancholy and sat there in gloomy silence, plunged in deep thoughts. My Alter seemed to be greatly affected, for he was scratching his earlock and constantly passing his hand over his face, beginning from his forehead and ending with his long beard, which he was clutching with his five fingers, muttering all the while : " *Atj, atj !* " I could see that he was beside himself.

As for myself, I was also what you might call a little *distrait*. Fishke's story was worrying me.

" Lord of the Universe," I thought, " what is it, that ' being gone on somebody ' ? " I had often heard of such things, but it was beyond my understanding. In my native town they used to say that it was a sort of madness brought about by witchcraft—an illness, a disease. Old witches could conjure up such a madness, such a disease, by giving you to drink some drops of their own concoction. Among us Jews, to be in love meant to suffer from some weakness or some fever ; it was something like being possessed by a demon, and when people ever

mentioned such cases they usually took hold of their eyelashes, spitting out seven times. Such an illness, or madness, however, I perfectly well remember, only happened either among the very rich or among the very poor. The middle classes were usually spared. I used to wonder why it was so, and I always thought that there must be a reason for it. Of course I did not believe in the story of the old witches and so on, although my fellow-Jews considered it very unorthodox on my part to have my doubts about the old witches. The old crones used to shake their heads and to say: "Fancy! a good Jew who does not believe in witchcraft and in the devil!"

I thought and thought, and at last hit upon an explanation.

The very rich have everything to their hearts' content, no worries, and no cares, and are therefore on the look-out for new sensations. The idle rich have plenty of time for such silly things, for such *koutzenyu-moutzenyu*[1] and love-making, either seriously or by way of a pastime. The very poor, on the other hand, have nothing to lose. Living on the community, they are care-free, have no sense of shame or decency, and can afford such nonsense. But the middle classes are too busy to think of such idle things. They are always worried, constantly busy devising means to earn a living and make ends meet. The pivot round which their life is turning is *business*. They look at everything from a business

point of view. Even marriage is a business with them. When a Jew of the middle classes has made up his mind to take a wife his first question is : How much dowry has she got, what trousseau will she have ? And when everything has been properly discussed between the parties, then he leads his wife under the canopy. She becomes a *wife*, bears children, and together with her husband works, slaves and suffers. Whether she is beautiful or ugly, clever or stupid, that is her own business ; to her husband she is a *wife*, and a wife is a wife. What, are we nobles, dandies, or gentlemen, that we should think of such silly things ? We have no time for them ; we are Jews, merchants, brokers, shopkeepers. I know many good and pious Jews who never talk to their wives and rarely look at them, and yet no one is surprised at such behaviour. And even the wives themselves are quite satisfied, wishing their best friends and even their own children to be blessed with such good husbands and to lead such lives. When a wife dies, the good and pious Jew buries her and mourns for her, according to the ritual law, and soon afterwards begins to think of another wife. Your good and pious Jew considers marriage as a religious sacrament, an obligation. Altogether, he eats, drinks, marries, begets children and enjoys life, not because he wants to do so, but because religion bids him do it. He does everything in life in the name of religion, for the glory of God !

All this, however, did not apply to our poor, lonely Fishke. In his position, in his loneliness, the hunchback girl had proved a source of happiness to him. When a man is drowning he will catch at a straw. Fishke was alone, forsaken by all, friendless, miserable, persecuted, and the girl had been his comforter, his consolation, his very life. No wonder, therefore, I thought, that he had grown attached to her. When our souls are touched, when something cuts us to the quick, our hearts cry aloud, no matter whose heart it be; for the language of the heart is the same for the great and the small, for the learned and the ignorant. No wonder, therefore, that Fishke's heart was pouring out such deep and pure feelings and his lips were uttering such sincere words. And because they were sincere and came from the heart, they had affected me so deeply, and touched the chords of my own heart. All the preachers I have heard and all the books of a moralising nature I have read have never been able to move me so profoundly or to make me feel so good and so pious as the groan and sigh of a broken heart. Well, all this is quite right and in perfect order. Being deeply moved by Fishke's story, I had a right to feel melancholy and to be plunged in deep meditation. But what was the matter with my horse? What right had he to be *distrait*? He did not seem to care a hang that the ninth day of the month of Ab was approaching and that it was my business to visit a number of

small Jewish towns, to provide the inhabitants with copies of the Book of Lamentations. Instead of trotting along, my horse was standing still every few minutes; instead of keeping to the road, he showed an inclination to turn aside to the grass and the meadows. Alter's mare was not much better, but was imitating my horse.

I seized my whip and showed it to my *shlimmazel*, read him morals, lectured him properly. At first he seemed to resent the whip, but soon he decided to take the hint and began to trot briskly.

After a while Fishke continued his story:

"I will cut it short," he said. "I took the road leading to Odessa, in the hope of meeting the gang or hearing some news as to their whereabouts, but it was a sheer waste of time. I was sick of life, sick of wandering about, and I yearned for a settled life, for the life I had been used to before my marriage. At last I reached Odessa.

"During the first few days of my stay in Odessa I felt quite miserable. The life and the houses were so different from what I had been accustomed to in our small Jewish towns. There, when I went out *schnorring*, visiting the houses of the people, it was simple indeed. You need not knock or ring a bell, but simply open a door and you are inside. You see the master or the mistress; they give you the few coppers or whatever it is and off you go. In Odessa it was quite different. There were gates, big closed doors, and you have to knock or ring a bell,

to beg admittance. I felt shy about ringing the bell and my hand trembled when I pulled the bell-rope. More than once a cook or some other servant told me to be off and that the tenants of the house were not Jews at all. I was wandering over the streets in search of one of our fraternity of *schnorrers* with bags, but met none. No ordinary *schnorrers* were to be seen in the streets of Odessa. At some doors at which I knocked I met a young man in European dress, offering a small book to the master of the house. He was an author, hawking about his literary wares. Everywhere he met with a polite or rude refusal, whilst I, who was *frankly* begging for alms, received a few coppers. This chap, I thought, is one of the modern *schnorrers*, decently dressed, calling himself an author, but a beggar after all. What a fool! Why *schnorr* with a book and get a fig, when you can beg frankly and honestly and get something? I preferred to walk on the beaten track and to follow in the footsteps of my forefathers who had begged and *schnorred* frankly and honestly, without any pretexts and without any new-fangled ideas.

CHAPTER XXIII

"SCHNORRING" AT ODESSA; OR, THE ODESSA VAPOUR-BATHS

"AFTER a short time I got to know Odessa very well, learned its secrets, and became acquainted with the customs prevailing among its inhabitants. I laid my hand on the pulse of the town and unravelled the mystery of *schnorring* in its streets. Odessa, like other big towns, is like a snuff-box with a secret spring. Once you manage to touch the secret spring, the lid flies open, and you can treat yourself to as many pinches of snuff as you like. I had put my finger on the spring, and the *schnorring* avenues were now open to me. I now came across numerous *schnorrers* and beggars, crowds of them.

"There were *schnorrers* with beggar's bags, and *schnorrers* without bags, *schnorrers* whom you only meet in Odessa and in other big cities, such as Palestinian Jews, Turkish and Persian Jews, who are jabbering in Hebrew. There were old Jews with wives, and young bachelor Jews. There were Jews on their way to Jerusalem, there to end their days and die in the Holy Land, but who were in the meantime staying on in exile, sponging on the community, marrying and begetting children. There were deserted wives and grass-widows, women with

spasms, and old men with ruptures who had come to seek healing in the waters of the Leman. There were old-fashioned recipients and *schnorrers*, and modern beggars who shaved their beards and frequented cafés and restaurants. There were *schnorrers* dressed like well-to-do people; there were some who had absolutely nothing, and there were others who apparently possessed property but were *schnorrers* in reality. All the *schnorrers* from our own part of the world whom I met in Odessa were singing the praises of the town. One of them, however, explained to me the difference between the *schnorrers* in Odessa and those of Foolstown and other small Jewish towns.

"'In both Foolstown and Odessa,' he said, 'the *schnorrer* and poor man eat their crust of bread, but whilst in Foolstown they eat it in sadness and worry, in Odessa they eat it to the cheerful strains of an organ, for plenty of organs are being played in Odessa.'

"One day, when I was walking in the street, someone treated me to a blow in the small of my back. Turning round, I beheld Yontel, Yontel of Foolstown, Yontel the cripple, who was crawling along on his backside. He was overjoyed at our meeting, and so was I, for in Foolstown we had been good friends. I remembered having been at Yontel's wedding when, during the cholera, he was married at the cemetery,[1] and therefore he was called the 'Cholera bridegroom.'

" ' Aha, Fishke,' said Yontel, ' peace be upon you. Welcome to Odessa ; a fine town, is it not ? '

" When he saw me making a grimace instead of expressing enthusiasm, he exclaimed in a tone of annoyance :

" ' What ! your Foolstown is perhaps a town ? A worm sitting in a radish thinks that there is nothing sweeter in the world. You wait, Fishke, until I show you the beauties of Odessa, and then you will soon change your opinion.'

" Yontel told me of his life in Odessa and of his popularity with its inhabitants. He was highly considered in all the shops, where people received him well, offering him what was due to him with great respect.

" ' And where is your wife ? ' I asked my friend.

" ' My wife ! ' said Yontel with contempt ; ' a nice wife the community of Foolstown had given me. You know my wife ? She has only one lip, her lower lip is lacking, and yet—she can give you the lip and scold you better than other two-lipped women. As for her tongue, it is as sharp as a razor.'

" ' Alas,' said I, ' there is no remedy against a scolding wife, be she lipless and even without a nose. Even a blind wife is a plague.' I gave Yontel a short description of my own misfortune and drew a portrait of my blind wife.

" ' Then spit on her, Fishke ; do as I did, let her go to the devil.'

" ' What do you mean by letting her go to the

devil? Without a divorce? I am a Jew, am I not? and I should have to marry again; and how could I do so without first divorcing my wife?'

"'He would have to marry again!' mocked Yontel. 'Fishke, you are a real Foolstowner!'

"I frequently met Yontel, and we both trudged along through the streets of Odessa, he crawling on his backside and I on my crooked legs. He was constantly singing the praises of Odessa, pointing out to me the fine houses and wide streets as if he had been their happy owner.

"'Look here, Yontel, do you call this a town?' I said, pointing out the crowds on the boulevard; 'a town, where men and women are walking arm in arm, men with their beards shaved off and women showing their hair and other parts of their body? For shame! Odessa is a fine town, I do not deny it, and it is only a pity that it is not inhabited by our own good and pious Jews. Had the inhabitants resembled our Jews of Foolstown then it would have been all right.'

"Two men passed us, both dressed in European fashion, with neither beards nor earlocks. One of the men stopped, talked to Yontel and gave him some money.

"'Do you know who these people are?' said Yontel quite proudly. 'One is the headmaster of the Jewish free-school and the other is a communal worker! They are acquaintances of mine, and I know them quite well.'

"'That the headmaster of the Jewish free-school?' I retorted. 'A fine headmaster without a beard and earlocks. I can imagine what sort of a free-school it must be. Surely, Yontel, you cannot compare this fellow to Reb Herzele Mazik,[1] the headmaster of our free-school in Foolstown? Reb Herzele is a Jew in the fullest sense of the word.'

"'With earlocks or without earlocks, I assure you it is all the same, as I am a Jew,' said Yontel obstinately.

"I could see that Odessa had changed Yontel greatly and that he was not the man I had known in Foolstown. No, we could never agree; I criticised the synagogue in Odessa, the reader and the Rabbi; they were all too modern to my liking, and had thrown off all their Jewishness.

"'What is the matter with you, Yontel?' I said; 'you are stark mad, raving. What has come over you? How can you talk like that?' But Yontel only smiled, saying: 'Fishke, you are a fool, you do not understand the world.'

"I saw that it was sheer waste of time to make Yontel see his errors and induce him to mend his ways.

"'Look here, Yontel,' I said, 'I am not going to discuss any longer with you the Jewish life and Jewishness of Odessa; let us rather talk business. I am sick and tired of this *schnorring* profession, the competition is too keen. It would be better to find some other source of revenue, to hit upon some

other trade and devise means how to earn a living.'

" ' You are not going to start a bank or open a shop, I presume ? ' said Yontel. ' Then what are you going to do ? '

" ' Don't be silly, Yontel,' I said, ' talk sense There are plenty of ways of earning a living without being a banker or a shopkeeper.'

" ' Oh yes,' said Yontel, ' there are. You could, for instance, become the president of a charitable institution or a communal worker, distributing the money of the community. Such occupations yield quite decent profits. But, alas, Fishke, such sources of revenue are not for the likes of us ; the roads leading to such summits are barred to us. Let us think of other sources of revenue. You could, for instance, deal in old clothes. Plenty of Jews are earning their living by buying and selling old clothes.'

" ' No, Yontel,' said I, ' old clothes you must buy, and for this you require cash. Besides, you must clean them and mend and patch them up, and some knowledge of tailoring is required. It would not be so difficult if it were a question of Foolstown trousers. In Foolstown it does not matter whether the trousers are torn and not mended, but the Odessa trousers are quite a different matter, and I could never dare to handle them.'

" ' If you are so much afraid of Odessa trousers,' said Yontel, ' then why not turn to onions, garlic, and lemons ? You must know, however, that here

you would have to pile your goods upon a wheelbarrow and shout in the streets: "Onions, garlic, lemons, two a *groschen* each." '

" 'I can shout as well as others,' said I, 'but to drag along a wheelbarrow, to be harnessed like a horse, is not for me. I am not strong enough for that work. Besides, there is again the question of ready cash; where is the money to come from?'

" 'My dear Fishke, if you wish to make a living without forking out, without risking any money, then you must, after all, adopt one of the professions or trades I have already pointed out to you, such as that of a communal worker, to which, however, only people of high standing and position are admitted. I know of no others.'

" 'Best of all,' said I, 'I should have liked to be employed in a vapour-bath. In the brick-walled vapour-bath in Foolstown I used to give satisfaction. Had it not been for my unhappy marriage I would have done very well indeed and risen very high. Now, Yontel, if you are really so respected and considered in Odessa, if you have some influence here, then help me to get into the vapour-bath. Be a brother, dear, sweet Yontel, and give me a proof of your greatness and influence here.'

" 'Fishke,' said Yontel with a smile, 'I will not reply to your request for the present, but advise you first to have a look at the vapour-baths here.'

"I followed Yontel's advice and visited several vapour-baths in Odessa, and my disappointment was

keen indeed. Have you ever heard of a vapour-bath that is light and clean and furnished nicely with easy couches and other such things? There was no question of steaming your shirt, underwear, and socks by heat.

"'No,' I said to myself, 'such a vapour-bath is not for me.' Besides, it is not the same pleasure to be there as it was in Foolstown. In Foolstown it is a vapour-bath that you can call a vapour-bath. There you meet companies of Jews sitting or lying on the benches, talking and discussing all sorts of weighty matters. It is a sort of a club. They are discussing all that is going on in the world, and you gather much news.

"I visited several other vapour-baths, and everywhere I experienced the same disappointment. It was not the same familiar smell as in the vapour-bath in Foolstown. And as for their ritual swimming-bath, it was really ridiculous. In Foolstown you can almost feel the water in the ritual swimming-bath; it has a peculiar colour and is much denser than ordinary water. You feel at once that it is Jewish and that there is Jewishness in it. In Odessa the water in the ritual swimming-bath was pure and clear like ordinary water, so that you could almost drink it.

"'Well, Fishke,' asked Yontel with a smile, 'have you seen a vapour-bath here?'

"'*Atj*,' said I, 'it is not worth while talking about it, it is too ridiculous for words. Call this a vapour-bath? No, Yontel, Odessa is no place for me!'

CHAPTER XXIV

FISHKE MEETS THE HUNCHBACK MAID; OR, IN THE OLD RUIN

"ALTHOUGH I was far from being delighted with Odessa, I stayed there over the winter, for how could I venture out upon the road in the cold, naked and barefoot? Besides, I was alone, and in a strange corner of the world. No sooner, however, had the sun begun to cast her rays and shed her warmth, and the smell of summer had penetrated into my nostrils, than I grew restless.

"In olden times summer used to mean to me simply summer and nothing else. It meant warmth, a bright sun, long days, green fields. Well, of course, that was pleasant. The cows were driven out to the pasture, there was milk and cream and also a new onion, a garlic, a radish, quite important items for poor Jews. This time, however, summer had assumed quite a different aspect to me. It seemed to talk to me, to make my heart palpitate, to remind me of *her*. Every blade of grass, every tree, and every song of a bird seemed to be telling me something, bringing a message from *her*. I was constantly thinking: thus she was seated by my side, thus she was smiling, and thus she used to pour out her heart. My pulses were beating fast, and

my blood was coursing in my veins. A sweet melancholy took hold of me and it drew me, it drew me, thither, thither, far away. What had summer to do with it ? Was it entirely its work ? Or simply a weakness, a spasm from which I was suffering ? I cannot tell, but I know that I did not feel as usual and was not the same Fishke as of old. Yontel noticed it.

" ' Fishke,' he inquired, ' what is the matter with you ? Are you ill ? You don't look well. What is ailing you ? '

" ' *Atj*,' said I, placing my hand upon my heart, ' it is nothing. I feel as if something was drawing me, giving me no rest,' said I, heaving a deep sigh.

" ' I understand,' said Yontel, ' I understand. It is drawing you to your Foolstown, yonder where poverty is thriving and where onions and garlic are sending out their perfume. All right, Fishke, don't be ashamed, go to the place which is so dear to you.'

" I said good-bye to Yontel and took to the road. My head was in a whirl, my heart was yearning for her. Where was she now, I thought, what was she doing, how was she living without me ? Unconsciously my feet were carrying me slowly on the road towards Foolstown.

" Through villages and towns I walked, searching everywhere, in the hope of meeting *her*. I had walked in those days a long distance, traversed many Jewish towns and townlets, and the nearer I came

to Foolstown the lighter became my heart, and more cheerful did I grow. I was delighted to see once more the Jews of that district and to be among them. Their language, their mode of living, their behaviour, their manners were a pure joy to me and gladdened my bruised heart. I felt at home, among my own people. And indeed, the Jews in that district are a pleasure to behold. They know nothing of ceremonies, fashions and etiquette, they are free and easy and so simple. You can talk as loud as you like, you can gesticulate, you can dress as you like, it is nobody's business.

"As I was approaching Foolstown I began to feel easier in my mind. I thought of the brick-walled vapour-bath in Foolstown; hope once more entered my heart. I had implicit faith in the Almighty.

"On one fine morning, walking between wheat- and cornfields, I came to a dense forest. I advanced into it and, putting down my bag, took off my coat and lay down in the shadow of a tall tree. Well, what of it? I thought; trees are trees, grass is grass, and birds are birds, and I am I. I stretched myself, making up my mind to snatch a wink of sleep and get a little rest.

"Suddenly, methought I heard a rustle. I pricked my ears and listened, although my eyes were shut. The rustle became more audible, the steps were coming nearer. I began to feel interested, I did not know why. I tried to open my eyes, but had

some difficulty in shaking the sleep out of them; I was too tired to move. The steps had ceased, and I was dozing off, thoughts crowding my brain. A feeling of well-being crept over me, and I seemed to hear someone humming a familiar tune, singing a sad song I knew so well; it was gripping my heart, and yet it made me strangely happy. I felt inclined both to cry and to laugh. Suddenly something clutched me by my hair, and I heard a loud cry.

"I woke up with a start and looked round. Not far from me I beheld a pot full of strawberries lying on the grass, and a little farther away a woman was sitting, evidently frightened. I easily guessed what had happened. The woman must have been gathering strawberries, humming a tune in the meantime, and suddenly touching my head hidden in the high grass, she had been frightened and dropped her pot. I jumped up, seized the pot and advanced, shouting to her from the distance: 'Never mind, don't be frightened.' Scarcely, however, had I advanced a few steps when I let fall the pot and, with a cry of amazement, mingled with joy, stood still. The next moment we were clasping hands and gazing into each other's eyes, I and my hunchback girl. It was no dream but reality. Those were real trees, and real birds were singing in the branches and, as I thought, sharing our joy, mine and the hunchback's. We were both indescribably happy, both laughing, with

tears in our eyes, wondering and asking questions, and both talking and relating what we had been driven to go through.

"She told me all that she had endured from the gang since they had left me behind in that town a year ago. It was, of course, the red bastard who was behind it all. It did not suit his purpose that I should divorce my wife, for he was afraid that she would immediately insist on his marrying her. A blind woman out of whom he could make money was all right, but a blind *wife* he did not care for. Let another man keep her, and welcome. Besides, he did not like the idea of seeing me free and able to marry elsewhere. He had done his best to spoil the friendship between myself and the hunchback girl, and had availed himself of the opportunity to get rid of me.

"By and by, so the girl informed me, he got my wife into his clutches and did what he liked with her. What could she, blind as she was, do? How could she defend herself against him? When he had had enough of her nagging and had grown sick of her, he handed her over to the old man with whom I once went about *schnorring*. The red bastard no longer hesitated to thrash her, whilst the old man, too, did not spare her. My wife had grown rather old and thin in the course of this year.

"'The gang,' said the girl, 'is camping here in the forest, and I strolled away to gather strawberries.

"'I have found quite a beauty of a strawberry,' she concluded with a sweet smile.

"I told her my own story, and how much I had suffered. We decided now to remain together and never separate. I would do my best to make my wife consent to a divorce. Should she, God forbid, refuse, then we would both run away from the gang, and, placing our trust in the Almighty, await developments.

"As we were thus sitting in the grass, quite happy, we heard a noise of approaching footsteps and someone calling for the girl. Soon one of the gang appeared, and perceiving me he smiled mischievously. We got up to follow him, as we had made up our minds not to run away as yet. The *schnorrer* was running as fast as he could, being evidently in a hurry to announce the great news of my arrival.

"Behind the ruins of an old inn, standing in the forest, I soon perceived the familiar wagon-booths, whilst a little farther away, in a clearing, a cheerful fire was burning. The first to welcome me was, of course, the red bastard.

"'Aha,' he said, 'an honoured guest; peace be upon you, Reb Fishke. I am so glad to see you; I have missed you, indeed. And how fares a Jew?'

"Soon the others came to welcome me.

"'Come here,' they shouted, 'welcome the *bourgeois*.' Everybody treated me to a kick, a pinch or a push, so that my cap fell off my head. And suddenly I heard my wife's voice calling aloud:

'Where is he, *my* Fishke, where? where?' Groping her way to where I was standing, she fell upon my neck with a shout of joy. Her pleasure at meeting me caused me even greater pain than the pushes and pinches of the others. I did not like it, for it did not suit my plan of divorce.

"My wife continued to hug me, repeating all the while: 'Fishke, my own Fishke.' I felt quite sick at heart when I looked at that blind old woman, and noticed how lean and feeble she had grown. Where is her stout body, I thought, her health, her fat cheeks, her double chin? Just for the sake of appearances, I forced myself to ask her: 'How are you, Bassya?'

"'Fishke,' she said aloud, so that all could hear her, 'Fishke, you were perfectly right when you once said that in Foolstown we both enjoyed a good reputation; everybody knew me and respected me.' Saying these words, she assumed a proud mien, like a rich man, who had come down in the world, boasting of his former greatness.

"Heaving a deep sigh, my wife concluded: 'We have had enough of this wandering about the world like gypsies. I want to go home; take me home, Fishke, to our own town, to our own people, to our houses and householders.'

"This was more than I had bargained for. I had not expected to hear such words from her, and I made a grimace. The world had suddenly grown dark in my eyes. The red bastard also made a

grimace. He was evidently afraid of losing a good source of revenue, as he would no longer be able to make money out of my wife, whilst I was thinking: 'On the contrary, you may keep her and welcome.' In any case, he looked daggers at me; his eyes were bloodshot, and his wrath was rising.

"The members of the gang, men and women, were all busy. Women and girls were cooking supper and baking potatoes, whilst young men were standing round, teasing them, pinching them and joking. The women pretended to be angry at the liberties the men were taking, but in reality they liked it. They ran away, but allowed themselves to be caught, giggling aloud. Some were snoring on the grass, others were wrestling with each other, whilst others again were patching up their old coats. In a word, the gang was alive. My wife was holding me fast, hanging upon my neck. She was talking, talking—and she could talk—although this time it was to tell me how happy she was that I had returned. She told me how much she had suffered in my absence, and that she only wanted me to take her away from here.

"'Henceforth,' she concluded, 'we will live together until death separate us, as is right and proper.' I scarcely answered her, thinking all the time how to escape from her. At last I managed to give her the slip and to breathe a little more freely. I found out the hunchback, and we walked away a short distanee from the camp. We both

agreed that things did not look bright, as I could now see that my wife would flatly refuse to consent to my divorcing her. As for remaining with the gang, it was quite impossible ; it meant selling one's soul to the devil. We talked for some time, and agreed that we had no choice but to run away. As the members of the gang had decided to stay the night in the forest, we could expect no better opportunity than the present. To-night, therefore, we would run away and leave the gang for ever.

" Whilst we were thus discussing and making our plans we saw the red bastard arriving with a pair of horses.

" ' Let us not wait until he comes nearer,' said the girl ; ' it would not do for him to see us thus together.' She went one way and I another.

" The red bastard seemed very busy ; he was evidently plotting something, all the time conversing in whispers with the old man who was his right hand, his lieutenant. I tried to avoid him and not come near him.

" Whilst the members of the gang were busy, or enjoying themselves, the hunchback came up and told me in a whisper what the red bastard had decided. Before sunset they would make a move and leave the forest. He had his reasons for it, for the horses he had brought in were stolen, and he was naturally anxious to leave here as quickly as possible. It was bad news indeed she told me ; our opportunity to escape had now gone, and

Heaven only knew when we could find another one. I stood there like one bereft of his senses, not knowing what to do. The girl looked at me, a great pity in her shining eyes, and her cheeks flaming. For a few moments she thus gazed at me and then said in a trembling voice :

" ' Fishke, be at the old ruined inn in a few moments ; hide there in the garret ; you understand ? '

" ' I understand, I understand,' I exclaimed, jumping up for joy, ' and you, too, will come ? '

" She nodded her head by way of an answer.

" ' Yes,' she breathed, ' yes. But hush, for Heaven's sake, do not talk so loud.'

" I did not find it necessary to take leave of my wife and say good-bye to her, although I pitied her greatly. But it was her own fault ; it was she who had effected the first gap, then made it wider and wider. Now it was too late, and what could I do ? Besides, it was now quite impossible for me to join with her, to begin our life over again ; we were as far apart as Heaven and earth. I left her without wishing her good night and proceeded to the old ruin.

" You can easily imagine the feelings that were swaying me when I entered the place. After so much suffering, God had at last willed it that we should be united, the girl and myself. Here in this ruin our future destiny lay and would be decided, and henceforth a new life would begin for us. I

easily climbed up to the garret, and through the holes in the floor I could look down and see what was going on below. I sat down in a dark corner and waited. My heart was beating fast and loud, and every minute seemed a year to me. I listened to the faintest noise. A straw rustled, and I fancied I heard footsteps. 'She is coming,' I said.

"Suddenly methought that I heard her calling my name, and indeed a voice from below reached my ear. Another moment and we shall be together and redeemed from our misery and suffering. I tried to call out to her, but my lips refused to move. And then—quite distinctly—I heard someone calling me by name. I looked down through a hole and—imagine my horror when I beheld—whom do you think? The red bastard and the old man, his lieutenant.

"'You look to your job, to your part of the business,' the bastard was saying; 'see that the old hag does not escape us, you understand?'

"'Don't you worry,' replied the old man, 'she has had her share. I gave her a good hiding and thrashed her so soundly that she cannot move a limb.'

"'As for the lame dog, I will deal with him myself. I hate the beggar, I cannot stand the look of him and will now settle old accounts with him.' Thus spoke the red bastard, and my heart fell into my boots.

"'As it seems to me,' said the old man, 'your

stolen horses are evidently Jewish; they are rather lean and thin, with crooked backs.'

"'Shut up, you old bag of bones; you had better go, you dog, and search here in the garret; see whether you cannot ferret out something useful for a driver. This beastly hole was, after all, an inn in days bygone.'

"Terror seized me when I heard these words. I was trembling so violently that unwillingly I knocked my foot against the floor. The two raised their eyes to the ceiling, stood there for a moment looking surprised, then said: 'Something, or somebody, is up there; we must have a look.'

"My head was in a whirl. I heard noises in my ears and methought that I was soaring in the air. I was indeed in the air, for a pair of powerful hands had suddenly seized me and hurled me downstairs. Then I heard the bastard's voice:

"'Blessed be he that cometh,' he was mocking. 'Reb Fishke, welcome.' I looked up and saw his face. There was murder in his eyes. He looked to me like a cat when it is on the point of choking to death the little mouse it has caught. The old man I did not see; he had evidently made himself scarce, leaving me face to face with the red bastard.

"'Now, little man,' said the red bastard, 'recite your prayers and confess your sins, for I am going to do for you now. I ought to have done it long ago, in that cellar, but never mind, you won't lose

for having waited. Fayvushke never forgets.'

"I fell at his feet, begging him to spare my life, but my pleading, my prayers and my tears were of no avail. Taking out a long knife, he looked at it lovingly, held it to my eyes and greatly enjoyed my trembling and struggling. I tried to move him by promising him a seat in Paradise in the next world; I even offered him my own share of the world after death, but he only stared at me. I tried to frighten him with hell and Divine judgment.

"'The Almighty,' I told him, 'will surely punish thee for having shed innocent blood, and thy tortures in hell will be terrible.'

"He only bit his lips and raised up his knife, ready to slay me. I shut my eyes, preparing to die an untimely death, when someone suddenly seized him from behind and cried in unspeakable agony: 'No, no, I will not let you do this.'

"Greatly confused, the red one turned round and beheld the hunchback.

"'*Hzoufah*,' he roared, 'get out . . . for otherwise . . .'

"'No, no,' cried the girl, 'I will not budge from here, but rather die with him.'

"Falling upon the red bastard's neck, she wept and begged and entreated him not to kill me. She promised him eternal life and a golden throne in Paradise, but the red bastard was not to be bribed by such alluring promises. His murderous wrath,

however, had somewhat abated, and hurling the girl away into a corner, he turned to me and thus spoke :

" ' I am sorry, I am very sorry indeed, you dirty little beast, to have been disturbed in my act of doing away with you. I would have crushed you to death like a little worm, like a louse ! '

" Taking up a rope he had brought with him, he tied me up hand and foot.

" ' Now,' he said, ' you lie still, you dirty little dog, and don't you dare to breathe ; wait here until death releases you. Remember, however, you little beggar, should a miracle happen to you, should some dead grandmother of yours have interceded on your behalf in Heaven, then I warn you never to cross my path again, for I will cut your throat, as sure as my name is Fayvushke.'

" He then turned to the girl, who had been rolling on the floor, sobbing and lamenting and tearing out her hair.

" 'As for you, you *Hzoufah*,' he roared, giving her a kick with his foot, ' as for you, I will deal with you later on. I understand now it was all a pre-arranged job, a wedding without music, a union on the quiet. A nice girl, upon my word, all the time pretending that she was as demure, as moral and chaste as a *Rebbetzen*.[1] Henceforth I will show you what is what, you *Hzoufah*, you ! '

" Seizing the poor girl by her wrists, he gave me a last warning to lie still, and dragged her away.

"The torments of hell are nothing compared to what I suffered. I was not in hell, but the fire of hell was burning in me. My hair literally stood on end, and my terror and agony beggar description.

"A little later a noise and hubbub, the shouting of men and the screeching of wheels reached my ears: the gang was leaving the camp, dragging away, Heaven knew where, my heart, my poor, unfortunate hunchback girl!

"For a long time I lay thus, tied up hand and foot Hot tears were rolling down my cheeks, whilst the rope was cutting my flesh like a sharp knife. I was tremendously thirsty, a hellish fire was burning my inside, and in my extreme agony I began to shout for help. The gang, I thought, must already have left. There was, however, no answer to my cries, and I grew tired of shouting. My end was near, the Angel of Death would soon come, so I thought, to take away my soul. I prepared to die an untimely and unnatural death, to leave the world so young.

"I must shout once more, I thought, before breathing my last; I must cry aloud once more, like the last blast of the ram's horn after sunset on the Day of Atonement,[1] that a human soul in agony was leaving the body in which it had been imprisoned.

"At this moment," concluded Fishke, "God, in His mercy, sent you, Reb Alter, to save my life."

CHAPTER XXV

ALTER GOES IN SEARCH OF HIS DAUGHTER; OR, FISHKE'S JOY

By the time Fishke had finished his sad story, night had fallen and darkness descended upon us. We were approaching the green hill near Foolstown. The green hill of Foolstown is quite famous, and there is a popular song, a lullaby which mothers usually sing when rocking their infants to sleep. I used to like this song, which my dear mother —may her soul dwell in a bright compartment in Paradise![1]—used to sing to me. The words run as follows:

Upon the green hill,
In the tall grass,
Stand two Germans,
Long whips in their hands
Tall men they are,
Wearing short coats,
Our father, our King . . .

I used to like this song better than all other songs. In my childish fancy the green hill was something wonderful. I pictured it not as an ordinary hill, but as some rare and radiant thing, a hill made of the clay from the land of Palestine, something like the

Mount of Olives, or the Mountain of Lebanon. And the Germans? I beg the Germans' pardon, I imagined them not as human beings, but as some strange and wild animals, cows or oxen, or, perhaps, Messianic bulls, standing on guard and lashing with their whips all those who ventured to approach the holy soil of Foolstown. Before entering Foolstown everybody was treated to a taste of their whip, and therefore people in Foolstown gave one the impression of whipped curs.

When I had grown older, the meaning of the song dawned upon me. The green hill was an ordinary hill, not so green as it was muddy and slippery, and the "tall men" applied to those long-fingered and agile gentry around Foolstown who are in the habit of picking your pockets and stealing your bundle, or luggage. It is usually the custom, when visiting Foolstown for the first time, to have no luggage whatever; when you are more experienced you venture to carry some luggage with you, but a few miles before the town you grow restless and constantly cast looks around you, keeping an eye on your luggage and feeling your pockets. What I mean to say is that as soon as we had reached the famous green hill I began to smell and to feel Foolstown.

Having looked about me, touched my luggage and felt my pockets, I remembered Fishke, who was sitting in a corner of my wagon-booth looking very sad and gloomy.

I began to comfort and console him as well as I could, speaking to him in a tone which I tried to render cheerful, and then concluded my speech with the second half of that famous song. It ran as follows :

Our Father and King,
My heart is cheerful ;
Cheerful we shall be,
Wine we shall drink,
Meat fritters we shall eat,
And our merciful God
Never will forget.

" Never mind, Fishke " I said. " Cheer up, for God is always near at hand."

" Yes, Reb Mendele," said Fishke, " but what I should like to ask you is only this : If God is so merciful, then why did He make us meet again, I mean the hunchback girl and myself, and immediately separate us once more ? After the bright moments we had enjoyed, this second separation is even more torturing. It looks as if God had done this to spite us. Great Heavens, Lord of the Universe, whom dost Thou thus torture ? Whom ? Two unfortunate, miserable cripples ? Would it not have been better for them never to have been born than to live such an unhappy and miserable life ? "

Thus spoke Fishke, and by way of an answer I made a pious and God-fearing face, and shaking my

head only said: "*Te-te-te.*" This meant as much as to say: "We must not ask such questions." I did not say these words because I really felt that they were an adequate answer to Fishke's questions, but only just so, because such is the way of the world. When someone, in his agony of heart, is asking rather perplexing questions with regard to Providence, then we consider it as our duty to read him a lecture and to rebuke him. Having done this, that is to say, having done my duty and lectured Fishke, I at once opened my mouth and spoke as an ordinary human being should speak:

"Tell me, Fishke," I said, "you never told us the girl's name; you have only spoken of her as the hunchback. Tell us now, what is her name?"

"What for, Reb Mendele? Why do you want to know the girl's name? What is it to you? And why should I give away a girl's name?"

"I want to know, Fishke," said I, "because it may prove useful. You see, my dear boy, I am constantly travelling all over the country and am meeting a good many people. If I knew her name I could make inquiries here and there and discover her whereabouts. You understand now, Fishke, the reason of my curiosity?"

"Yes, Reb Mendele," said Fishke. "The girl's name is Beyla. Beyla is her name."

He had scarcely uttered these words when we heard a heartrending groan and a noise as if something or somebody had fallen down. Looking

round, I was frightened to behold Alter lying stretched out in the wagon-booth. He was as pale as a sheet and groaning and sighing bitterly.

"What is the matter with you, Reb Alter?" I asked; "aren't you feeling well? Would you like a drop of brandy?"

"Bah!" was Alter's reply. Pulling himself together, he sat up. A little reassured with regard to Alter's health, I continued to question Fishke:

"Do you know her mother's name? Do you know where she came from?"

"Yes," said Fishke, "the girl told me that her mother's name was Elka and that her father had divorced her. They used to live in Parasiteville. When the mother got into a temper she used to remind the child of her misfortune and speak of her grudge against her former husband, that she might visit his sins upon their little daughter."

"What, in Parasiteville?" I asked in amazement. "Who could he have been, that wicked man with a heart of stone who had thrown his own flesh and blood amongst strangers and rendered his own daughter so unhappy? Reb Alter," I exclaimed, "*you* are from Parasiteville, you must know who that man was!"

Alter was more dead than alive; he sat there staring at us, his mouth wide open, and looked like a man bereft of his senses. Fishke was wrinkling his forehead, trying to remember.

"His name was—his name was—let me see . . ."

"Alter was his name," Alter suddenly burst out, and fell down all in a heap.

"Quite right," cried Fishke, looking at Alter without understanding. "Quite right, Alter was his name. And his surname? What was his surname? Oh yes, Yaknahaz. The mother used to beat and pinch the girl and call her in her anger 'Yaknahaz's brat.'"

I had suddenly guessed it all, and felt greatly embarrassed. Alter was now sobbing aloud, beating his breast and confessing his sins.

"It is all my fault, I am the cause of her suffering. She was right when she said: 'My father has killed me.' God is punishing me now, and that is the reason why ill-luck is dogging my footsteps."

I started to comfort and console my travelling-companion, to find excuses for his ugly conduct.

"We are only mortal men, men of flesh and blood," I said, "and many a great man has committed such a sin. Even our ancestors, those just and pious men, erred when there was a woman in the case, and were too weak to resist temptation. Many otherwise perfect men have sinned for the sake of the woman they had married, and were cruel towards their children, the issue of a first marriage."

Fishke, his eyes wide open, looked at us, trying to grasp the meaning of our talk.

It had grown quite dark, and the stars were twinkling, winking at us from the sky above, looking down upon us with their bright eyes as if

taking part in our conversation. A red moon suddenly rose and gazed down upon us. Methought that she, too, was rather interested and anxious to know how all this would end.

Lifting up his eyes to the star-studded vault above, Alter suddenly spoke:

"I swear by Him who lives for ever that I will not return to my wife and children, will not marry my daughter, ere I have found my lonely, homeless child. Heaven and earth are my witnesses. I will at once follow the gang of *schnorrers*, and woe unto him who shall venture to stand in my way."

With a shout of joy Fishke fell upon Alter's neck, hugging and kissing him. He was greatly confused, and in a voice choked with sobs he cried out: "Save her, save her."

My Alter jumped down from my wagon-booth, ran to his own cart, turned the horse's head, whipped his mare, and in a moment he was gone.

Fishke and I stared for a while after the disappearing wagon-booth without saying a word. I raised my eyes to the sky and again beheld the moon and the stars, but somehow they had changed. They seemed so terribly far away and proud, looking down upon us poor mortals with an air of aloofness and indifference.

I whipped my eagle, inviting him to get a move on and to run a little faster.

It was late at night when my wagon-booth was

rolling over the uneven pavement of the streets of Foolstown with a tremendous noise, as if anxious to announce to the inhabitants the arrival of two new Jews at Foolstown.

THE END

NOTES

Page 13.

NOTE

1. Public fast-day on the 17th day of Tammuz, the fourth ecclesiastical and tenth civil month, in commemoration of the breaking down of the Walls of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Page 16.

1. *Selihot,* penitential prayers recited during the week preceding the New Year and the days intervening between the New Year and the Day of Atonement.
2. Negligent fellow; unsuccessful and unlucky in life.

Page 18.

1. *Reb.*, abbreviation of *Rabbi*, Master.

Page 19.

1. *Atj*, word signifying indifference.

Page 21.

1. To distinguish between; I beg to distinguish, an expression used when inferiors are mentioned with superiors.
2. Expression of contempt used by Russian peasants, meaning probably Jew, Gaberdine!

Page 24.

1. In Russian vapour-baths the benches are arranged in tiers, somewhat resembling the gallery in a theatre, and the higher one mounts the greater is the heat.

Page 33.

1. Literally "calf."

Page 35.

1. At the conclusion of the ceremony of a betrothal and the reading of the engagement contract it is customary to break plates.

Page 46.

1. It is customary among Jews in Russia and Poland, when one meets someone coming from the vapour-baths to wish him good health, "much good may it do you."
2. Greeting of welcome.

Page 52.

1. Idle-talk; grandmother's talk. Here, however are meant the Bovo-books, Yiddish translation by Elia—Levita of the Romance, Sir Bevis of Hampton.
2. The ramhorn blown on Rosh-Hashana or The Jewish New Year.

NOTE

3. Lamps kindled on the Feast of Dedication or the Feast of Maccabees, also called the festival of lights. Hanukkah is mentioned in John x, 22.
4. Candles specially made for the ceremony of benediction recited at the conclusion of the Sabbath over wine, spices and a freshly kindled light.

Page 54.

1. A special prayer, beginning with the words Anēnū (answer us !) is recited during the afternoon service on fast-days.

Page 58.

1. The ninth day of the month Ab is a public fast-day in commemoration of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans.

Page 60.

1. Yehupez is the name used for Odessa in Yiddish literature.
2. Bieberich, or Biberach, name of a place.

Page 61.

1. The periodical reappearance of the moon is sanctified by the recitation of benedictions in the open air and known as the *Birkat-ha-Lebanah.*
2. Passage in *Birkat-ha-Lebanah.*

Page 64.

1. Pious and strictly orthodox Jews not only in the East but also in the West wear sidelocks, thus conforming themselves to the precept laid down in Leviticus xix, 27.

Page 75.

1. Mizrah, or Misrah, literally—the rising of the sun ; it is also applied to an ornamental picture hung on the eastern wall of a house, as the Jews turn toward the East while at prayer.
2. Haman the Agazite, *see* Book of Esther.
3. Palm branch, carried and waved on the Feast of Tabernacles.
4. During the seven days of the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (Sukkot) a circuit is made in the synagogue, and prayers beginning with the word Hoshaana (save now) are recited. On the seventh day willows are used in the ceremony. Hoshaana (Hoshānot) is applied both to the willows and to the prayers.

Page 78.

1. A Sabbath lamp.
2. Portion of the Pentateuch read in the synagogue on every Saturday.

Page 79.

NOTE

1. Section of the Pentateuch, *Num.* xxii.

Page 88.

1. Rickety, tottering.

Page 93.

1. Negligent woman, *fem.* of Shilmmesalnik.

Page 102.

1. Honey cake is partaken of at the ceremony of betrothal and on other festive occasions.
2. To perform the sacrificial ceremony on the eve of the Day of Atonement; hence the expression of.

Page 103.

1. Poor fellow; poor thing.

Page 104.

1. Expression used in Yiddish to indicate a sound sleep.

Page 107.

1. During the evening and morning services on the 9th day of Ab the Book of Lamentation is read in the synagogue in a particularly plaintive tune.
2. The twelth civil and sixth ecclesiastical month, during which orthodox Jews begin to prepare themselves by prayer and piety for the New Year and the Day of Atonement.

Page 108.

1. *Lekish,* literally—fool.

Page 112.

1. Russian word meaning: How terrible!

Page 117.

1. An animal, as a rule a cock used as a sort of sacrifice on the day previous to the Day of Atonement; hence the use of the word *kapparah* in the sense of a thing sacrificed for someone.

Page 118.

1. Piety.

Page 122.

1. Lady barber-surgeon.

Page 129.

1. Carefree.

Page 153.

1. Sabbath pudding.

Page 165.

1. Stuffed fish, prepared in the Polish and Russian Jewish fashion.

Page 170.

NOTE

1. Society of pious Jews who foregather in the synagogue at dawn and at other times for the purpose of reading the Psalms.

Page 178.

1. Arrogant, dissolute woman.

Page 180.

1. There is a superstition current among Jews in Eastern Europe that at night, when the synagogue is empty, the dead assemble there to pray.

Page 181.

1. Good luck.

Page 182.

1. One of the superstitions current among the Jews in Eastern Europe is the belief that it is a bad omen to meet a man or woman carrying empty buckets.

Page 183.

1. To be very intimate with ; to behave very nicely to someone.

Page 191.

1. It was believed that the meritorious deed of marrying an orphan within the precincts of the cemetery had the power to stop an epidemic. Young men thus married were called : "cholera-bridegrooms."

Page 194.

1. *Marzik, literally*—mischievous fellow, devil ; also clever fellow.

Page 211.

1. Wife of a Rabbi or a minister.

Page 212.

1. The sound of the ramhorn blown at the conclusion of the service on the Day of Atonement.

Page 213.

1. Paradise is supposed to consist of different compartments, dark and bright.

Hebrew and Yiddish words occurring several times.

Atj, an expression of indifference.
Groschen, small copper coin.
Hzoufah, wanton ; arrogant, dissolute woman.
Nebbich, poor fellow ; poor thing.
Shlimmezalnik, negligent fellow ; unsuccessful man.
Schnorrer, beggar.
Schnorren, to schnorr, to beg, to sponge.